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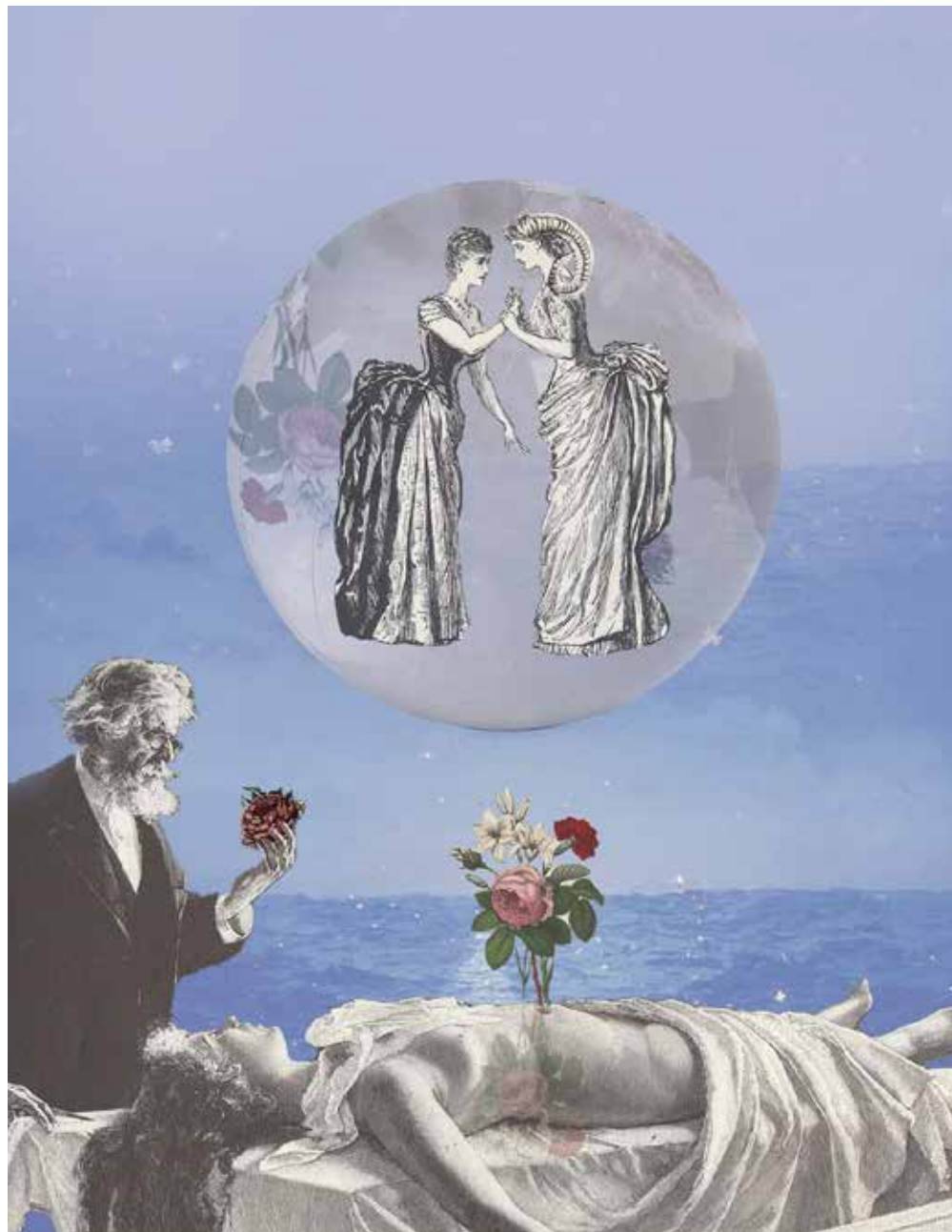
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“Smoking is indispensable if one has nothing to kiss.”

—Sigmund Freud, letter to Martha Bernays, 1884



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Spring Awakening (first edition of the play), 1891

Spring Awakening

HUMAN BEINGS have no breeding season, no rut or estrus or musth as some mammals do. When we talk about “the birds and the bees,” however, we’re talking the language of springtime. This issue of *TAP* marks the arrival of spring with themes of love, sex, desire, and addiction. Our writers explore the necessity and the difficulty of human togetherness, and chart paths forward through its complications. Wherever there are flowers, there are also bees.

Desire can sting. For example: marriage. Psychoanalytic psychologist Enrico Gnaulati, author of a new book, *Flourishing Love: A Secular Guide to Lasting Intimate Relationships*, applies to marriage the notion of the “Hedgehog’s Dilemma,” an analogy he gets from Freud, who in turn borrowed it from Schopenhauer. “Hedgehogs need to huddle to stay warm,” Gnaulati writes. “However, given their sharp quills, close proximity guarantees pain.”

That could be said not only of marriages but of psychoanalytic associations.

*

To that point, psychoanalyst Himanshu Agrawal shares further reflections on APsA’s recent internal conflicts, writing on life as a person of color in APsA, and in India, the UK, and the US. He does so with hopefulness rooted in acknowledgement, not denial, of pain. In this sense, Agrawal echoes Martin Luther King Jr.’s words before the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963. In the famous “I Have a Dream” speech he gave that day, he referred to the Founding Fathers’ declaration of universal human rights as a promissory note that had yet to be fully paid to Black Americans. Yet he hoped the country’s founding promise would be redeemed. Indeed, his activism would help redeem it. “We refuse to believe,” King said, “that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation.” That very day, two hundred miles north in

New York City, a double homicide occurred that would lead to the wrongful conviction of an innocent young black man, nineteen-year-old George Whitmore Jr., whom police coerced into a false confession. Whitmore spent a decade in jails and courtrooms on bogus charges. But his suffering also led to unforeseen progress. The miscarriage of justice against Whitmore helped decide the 1966 Supreme Court case *Miranda v. Arizona* that established a new right of due process, the so-called Miranda right of the accused to remain silent under questioning.

Psychoanalysis is even younger than America. Despite its failings and internal conflicts, the field may fulfill its promise yet. What is needed is the courage to imagine change. What is needed is for people to keep trying, *even after we fail*. Sociologist and social worker Ross Ellenhorn is an expert at helping others to reclaim hope after failure and try again. He writes about failure, hope, and “sacred originality” in his extraordinary book *Purple Crayons: The Art of Drawing a Life*, a delightful exegesis of Crockett Johnson’s classic 1955 children’s book *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, which extracts from Harold’s journey vital lessons for how to live and how to try again. Ellenhorn gives an inspiring interview in this edition of *TAP* about his community-integration work with addicts and other veterans of residential treatments.

Small examples of trying again abound at APsA. For a long time, nonanalyst psychotherapists unsuccessfully sought equal membership in APsA. They finally achieved it last year. Now that members of the Psychotherapy Committee have equal status, Margo Goldman shares the committee’s experiment with “distributed leadership,” an approach to group management that’s less hierarchical and more engaging of committee members. It’s also a descendant of psychoanalytic thinking on organizational psychology, as articulated by pioneers like Manfred Kets de Vries.

Social workers are another group APsA might welcome and incorporate better than it previously has. Flora Lazar offers a study of social work's important role in the history of psychoanalysis and points out that the majority of mental health services in this country are provided by social workers. Social workers, for that matter, are trained to attend to the well-being of communities. An organization like APsA, seeking to overcome disfunction and grow, ought to consider recruiting more social workers. Social worker Mike Langlois has not found it easy, financially or socially, to join the psychoanalytic community, as he writes in a witty and poignant first-person essay. One hopes that might change.

*

Desire must have an object, but is that object always a person? Greed is a form of desire that gropes for satisfaction in the inanimate realm. Psychoanalyst Alan Karbelnig unpacks the climate crisis as a product of oil company greed and of denial that thwarts our attempts to regulate that greed. "Given that global warming will definitively make the horrors of Israel v. Hamas, and Russia v. Ukraine look like minor misfortunes," Karbelnig wrote last year in his Substack newsletter, "I propose that we humans must take an activist stance." In this essay, he suggests psychoanalysts have a role to play in climate activism by helping others understand the intrapsychic motives to cling to the status quo, and by using the psychoanalytic idea of triangulation to unite opponents against a common threat.

Greed differs from addiction, as psychoanalyst Lance Dodes hastens to point out, but addiction too aims manifest desire at an inanimate object: drugs. Dodes, author of the book *The Heart of Addiction*, returns to *TAP*'s pages with his principle that addiction is a compulsion serving to ward off a feeling of helplessness. Psychotherapists should consider this formulation when they help patients who suffer from addiction. I would add a cautionary note, however, that psychoanalytic practitioners are ill-advised to assume they have the only answers necessary or sufficient to treat this complex, challenging, varied, and often very dangerous problem. The new *TAP* aims generally to bridge the gap between psychoanalysis and other realms of thought and practice, and Ross Ellenhorn's interview provides a useful companion piece to Dodes's narrower approach. Ellenhorn reflects on practical necessities beyond psychotherapy in the treatment of addiction—the importance of social supports,



Illustration by Austin Ratner

for example, for addicts whose symptoms present obstacles to living and working among others with complete freedom.

In *Stories from Life*, writer Drew Villano narrates her journey through drug and alcohol addiction in a way that subtly illuminates the psychological meanings it accrued in her life. Psychotherapy helped her understand and disentangle from addiction by understanding and disentangling from the emotional fallout of her childhood. With great artistry and a powerful voice, she shares with us the story of her grief and its devious ramifications.

*

What is the most forbidden desire? Perhaps it's one of those uncivil feelings from early childhood—small children's jealous longing to possess one of their parents in the same adult and intimate way that the other parent does. The flowering of that desire brings with it bee stings. Just ask Oedipus. My risqué article on the Oedipus complex, featuring an interview with "OnlyFans' Favorite MILF" and a tour of incest-themed internet porn, argues irreverently that this theory is not so obsolete as some would like to imagine.

Sabina Spielrein, author of the first doctoral dissertation ever written in psychoanalysis, is famous for her Oedipal

passion for an older, married man—her former psychiatrist, Carl Jung. Henry Zvi Lothane has helped translate into English for the first time Spielrein's Russian diaries and previously unpublished letters. He shares excerpts of his book *The Untold Story of Sabina Spielrein* and tries to reclaim Spielrein's impressive intellectual legacy from the salacious legends that have trailed after her. In David Cronenberg's 2011 film *A Dangerous Method*, for example, Keira Knightley and Michael Fassbender depict Spielrein and Jung engaged in sadomasochistic sexual acts when it seems unlikely the real historical people ever consummated their relationship physically.

*

Spielrein and Jung wrote and thought creatively. Many psychoanalysts do. Most of the writers in this issue are in fact practicing therapists. I'll be bringing in more new voices from outside the psychoanalytic community in the next issue. In the meantime, I'm thrilled to feature in this one original artwork by some accomplished and talented first-time contributors to *TAP*. Cartoonist and self-proclaimed "legacy media victim" Jason Novak has published his cartoons in many publications, including the *New Yorker*. Photographer Micheal McLaughlin's veteran eye has been hired by every corporation from Apple to Verizon and yielded multiple solo exhibitions at the Robin Rice Gallery in New York City; his gorgeous landscapes appear in *TAP*'s pages alongside Alan Karbelnig's piece on the psychology of climate change. And Ian Campbell's haunting and evocative fine-art photographs of "forgotten places" capture the lights in the darkness reflected in Ross Ellenhorn's interview.

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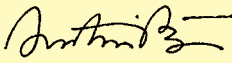
I derived the title of this issue's editor's letter from the 2006 Broadway musical *Spring Awakening*, an adaptation of Frank Wedekind's 1891 German play, *Frühlings Erwachen: Eine Kindertragödie*, which was almost certainly known to Freud. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud obtains an example of serial paraphraxis from a book on Wedekind's plays; an actor kept flubbing the line "The fear of death is an intellectual error" in Wedekind's one-act *Die Zensur (The Censorship)*. According to the *New York Times*, Wedekind "was continually at odds with the censors until his death in 1918." The playwright regularly took on sexual and transgressive subjects and was once jailed for satirizing Kaiser Wilhelm II.

The resonances between Wedekind and Freud are in fact striking. Like Freud and Nietzsche before him, Wedekind attributed much suffering to humanity's heavy-handed repression of its own animal nature. His play *Spring Awakening* bore a telling subtitle reflecting that suffering: *A Children's Tragedy*. Wedekind blames his young protagonists' suffering specifically on ignorance about their own sexuality, an ignorance enforced by social prohibitions. When a central character asks her mother where babies come from, for example, she's told the evasive German tale about the stork bringing them. Later, the young girl becomes pregnant by rape.

The stork legend had significance for Freud, too. We learn from his autobiographical writings that his determination to set the record straight about human sexuality originated in childhood frustrations with such lies. This led to some revolutionary discoveries in his adult work. But in his determination to resist the antisexual forces of repression, it's also clear Freud could overcompensate. Freud's accounts of human development and suffering sometimes overrated sexuality and underrated attachment—love and hate, dependence and independence. It remained for later generations of psychoanalysts to refine his theories and assign attachments more weight.

It's easy enough to confuse sex and love. They seem to impersonate each other from time to time. Tender, loving feelings can sometimes be harder and scarier to feel than sexual ones, and sex can displace love in our thoughts and actions. Love can displace sex too, as it does when we give attachment theory so much weight that we ignore sexuality and its attendant guilty conflicts, as some appear to do in entirely abandoning old theories like the Oedipus complex. Sex and love are dance partners and adversaries in the psyche. Perhaps that's why Lester Bangs, portrayed by the late Philip Seymour Hoffman in Cameron Crowe's 2000 film *Almost Famous*, says great art is about "love disguised as sex, and sex disguised as love."

As we awaken to spring and its mottled skies of sun and rain, these are good mysteries to contemplate.


AUSTIN RATNER

DONATE TO TAP





Illustration by Austin Hughes

Oedipus Returns:

Everything you wanted to know about MILFs but were too uncomfortable to ask

BY AUSTIN RATNER

PROBABLY NONE of Freud's ideas have aroused more disgust and incredulity than the Oedipus complex. Named after the mythical king in a Sophocles play who unwittingly sleeps with his mother and murders his father, the Oedipal theory hypothesizes that there's a bit of Oedipus in all of us. From early childhood, the theory goes, taboo feelings of lust and anger sometimes arise toward parents. These feelings in turn cause us conflicting feelings of shame, guilt, and anxiety. The emotional conflicts recede and then resurge in adolescence in forms that hide some of the painful, antisocial feelings from consciousness underneath symbols and displacements. A childhood sexual feeling toward one's mother might be redirected towards someone who is in one way or another *like* one's mother. "I Want a Girl (Just Like the Girl That Married Dear Old Dad)," as the old barbershop standard goes. Patterns of fantasy and dread evolve during childhood, but in one way or another may unconsciously influence our psyches for ever after.

It’s hard to tolerate the idea that people could have such icky, taboo fantasies, whether disguised or not. In the play, poor Oedipus lives in fear of the dreadful fantasies coming true. His wife Jocasta (who is also, unbeknownst to either of them, his mother) consoles him: “[F]ear not that you will wed your mother. Many men before now have slept with their mothers in dreams.” Good thing dreams don’t come true! Except that they do in Greek tragedies.

People hear the story of Oedipus and the theory bearing his name and sometimes conclude that Freud was a coked-up madman, a monster projecting his own twisted fantasies onto everybody else. As Freud put it in his *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*,

That is what our opponents believe; and in especial they think that we have “talked” the patients into everything relating to the importance of sexual experiences—or even into those experiences themselves—after such notions have grown up in our own depraved imagination. These accusations are contradicted more easily by an appeal to experience than by the help of theory.

For a host of reasons, the Oedipus complex has presented complications and challenges to experimental verification, but I’d like to make a bold claim that to my knowledge has never been made publicly or formally. The claim is this:

Since Freud’s death, a “natural experiment” has occurred that has confirmed the validity of a central element of the Oedipal theory.

A NATURAL EXPERIMENT

What was the experiment? A sequence of events over the last thirty years that unfolded like this:

1) The internet was created. The internet radically changed how people lived, including their sexual behavior. Pornography migrated from newsstands’ dirty magazine racks, adult theaters, and the seedy back rooms of videotape rental stores to computers connected to the internet. Individuals began consuming porn directly in their homes with a new degree of anonymity and privacy, free of public embarrassment. At the same time, computers’ facility for compiling statistics on their users’ behavior made en masse porn habits and preferences visible and trackable. In their book about internet pornography *A Billion*



Photograph by Austin Ratner

Wicked Thoughts, Sai Gaddam and Ogi Ogas accordingly call the internet “the world’s largest behavioral experiment.”

2) MILF porn became more popular than sliced bread. The acronym “MILF” stands for “mom I’d like to fuck.” The 1999 film *American Pie* popularized the term, using it to describe a voluptuous mom played by Jennifer Coolidge. The four letters of this acronym spell out what’s merely implied in the Sophocles play: that mothers and mother figures elicit not only chaste feelings, but also in some contexts elicit taboo, uncomfortable feelings of sexual desire. An article in *Playboy* in 2014 reported that “shockingly, the most popular search term on Pornhub isn’t even an explicit one, like ‘blowjob’ or ‘threesome’; it’s

the familial ‘mom.’” A Google search of the term “MILF” at 8:14 p.m. on January 7, 2024, yielded over 4 billion results—a billion-and-a-half more results than turned up when searching the household staple “bread.”

Of course, we can’t expect this natural experiment to prove Sigmund Freud’s theory of the Oedipus complex in all its details (e.g., his view that defenses against intolerable Oedipal feelings might account for many of his patients’ most troublesome symptoms). What it does reveal, at a minimum, is that males have pervasive, taboo, sexual feelings about moms. We can take this as a brute fact or, in a scientific spirit, we can attempt to explain it. And there is simply no theory in psychology that would have predicted it other than Sigmund Freud’s theory of the Oedipus complex.

Freud might have said a lot of other things that would *not* have been borne out by data collected over a century later. He might have made the outrageous suggestion, for example, that people harbor secret sexual feelings towards bread. And this natural experiment would have returned the verdict: nope, they’re much more interested in MILFs. He could have named any other form of perversity—bestiality, say, or pedophilia—as the secret longing most prevalent in the hearts of straight males. Instead, he said it was Oedipal desire, and the data ended up backing his claim. Freud’s hypothesis predicts and explains the MILF phenomenon with specificity and economy.

Other explanations are possible and worth considering, but the MILF phenomenon represents compelling evidence that Freud was onto something. Unless, of course, your abhorrence of the hypothesis prevents you from even considering it.

OEDIPUS DENIAL

While psychoanalysis has a ready explanation, the rest of psychology and psychiatry sputters and handwaves. Anything but admit that they were wrong, and that it looks like Freud was right. Dr. Justin Lehmiller, author of the 2014 *Playboy* article on MILFs, for example, lurches to an irrational halt before this evidence, jams the gearshift into reverse, and stomps the accelerator. He denies that MILF porn has anything to do with mothers at all, despite the acronym spelling it out for him, and insists that the term “MILF” is actually a misnomer:

It is somewhat surprising, then, that “MILF” is the term that stuck for describing this genre of porn. Whether the women in these videos are actually moms seems irrelevant, as are the viewers’ feelings about their own mothers. Indeed, MILF porn isn’t really about moms per se—it’s about real women who are comfortable and confident with their bodies and sexuality and aren’t afraid to show it.

He argues that it’s the power of these women that’s attractive, not their status as moms, and speculates that the MILF phenomenon may have originated in office cubicles, not in the psychic tensions of child development:

[A]ttraction to MILFs may be a reflection of the changing gender structure in the workplace, in which women today hold more positions of power than ever before.

Right. “Mom-I’d-Like-to-Fuck” porn is not about *moms*! Definitely not about liking to fuck them! Because that would be disgusting! It’s actually about the seductiveness of empowered

women in the workplace! MILF porn is *so not about moms*. Not at all. We can all agree that consumers of this porn would respond at least as strongly to another name. How about BCFA porn for “Business-Casual Feminist Appreciation,” because ... because otherwise ... because—Wait, what?

The moms in MILF porn do wield power, but only of a very dated and domestic variety: the power of family caretaker, rule-setter, and provisioner of food, clean clothes, and comfort. Her power is the power to gratify or to withhold pleasure. The fantasy moms in many of these videos are *domestic servants* who not infrequently do laundry, cook, clean, nag, and call themselves “Mom” and “Mommy” on camera to establish their maternal character before going on to serve the sexual needs of their young male wards. The dialogue in such videos often emphasizes familial, taboo, incestuous themes with about the subtlety level of a neon sign. I have yet to see a pornographic video in which a MILF turns anyone’s head with a memo summoning her sales team to the next action review.

What does Dr. Lehmillier have to say about the Oedipus complex? He admits that it’s the first explanation for the MILF phenomenon that comes to mind, then swiftly brushes it aside with an argument as circular as Jocasta’s chastity belt. In all the years since Freud conceived of the Oedipus complex, Dr. Lehmillier explains, “very little scientific support has been found for this idea.” In other words: *this new evidence can’t validate the Oedipus theory because the theory hasn’t been borne out by past evidence*. According to that logic, of course, nothing that hasn’t been proved already can ever be proved! The MILF phenomenon clearly *is* supportive evidence. Poor Dr. Lehmillier! He is up to his Oedipal eyeballs in denial, and we can certainly understand why. The facts he denies are icky and hard to tolerate. To dismiss them, he uses the same kind of emotionally driven rationalization we encounter in climate-deniers.

For a long time, climate scientists predicted carbon emissions would heat the atmosphere and wreak havoc on the environment. They could not conclusively prove their case in a laboratory, but over the years, a natural experiment unfolded that tested their theories and yielded confirmatory results. Global temperatures and sea levels rose in concert with rising carbon dioxide levels. Glaciers and snowpack receded, causing rivers to run dry and forest fires to increase. Atmospheric heat evaporated more water and began to shower the Earth with more storms and floods. But climate deniers dismiss manmade climate change as the explanation for these phenomena precisely because, in their minds, it wasn’t proven up to now. The rising seas, receding glaciers, droughts, and storms *are* evidence in support of the theory of anthropogenic climate change. The rise of MILF-themed pornography in the anonymous wilds of the internet is a natural experiment providing a new source of data to test one significant piece of Freud’s theory. It suggests many people really do secretly harbor these taboo feelings even though

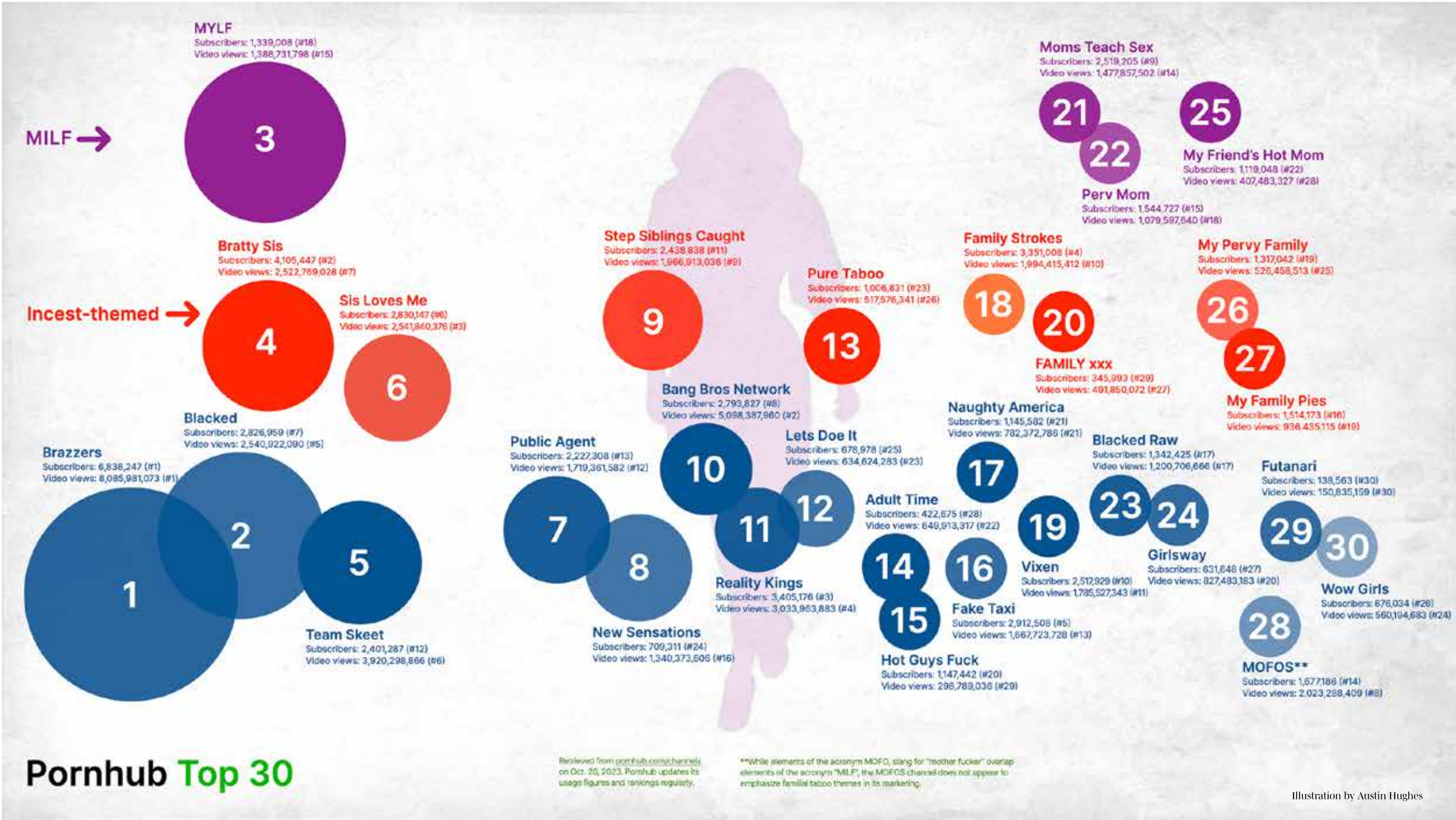


Illustration by Austin Hughes

they’re at the same time ashamed and disgusted by them. It suggests that Freud was right.

SOME FRESH DATA

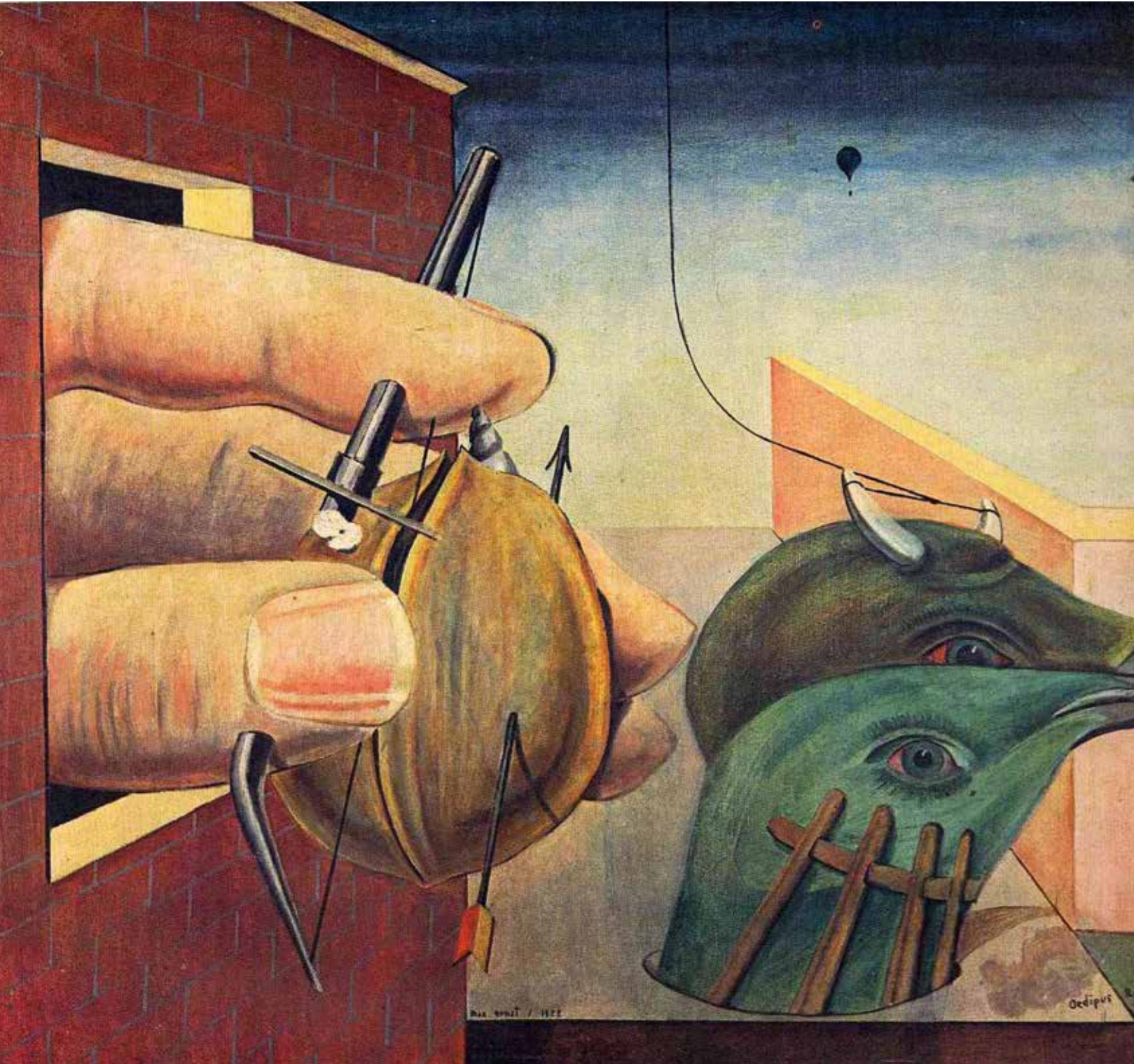
Let’s be braver than Lehmillier and look at the data with our eyes open. Even a cursory glance at the titles of channels on popular video-sharing site PornHub obliterates Lehmillier’s pious characterization of this porn. In fact, on the day I investigated, four of the top ten and twelve of the top thirty channels on Pornhub had explicit incest themes in the titles. This held whether I ranked the websites according to Pornhub’s

private algorithm, according to their reported subscription numbers, or by views. Clicking on the channels, sampling their videos, and visiting their home websites indicates that the titles accurately and consistently reflect the content. The My Family Pies channel, for example, refers satirically to the ’80s sitcom *Family Ties*. Maybe it’s selling ’80s TV porn, not incest porn? Let’s see. It advertises its content as follows:

Don’t be greedy, there’s enough family pie to go around! These horny step fathers, mothers, brothers, and step sisters love to share and keep it in the family. Peak behind closed doors to see how they

strengthen their family bonds. Stay for dessert and sample a piece of mom’s hot pie!

Hmm, no mention of Tina Yothers. Unsurprisingly, videos from My Family Pies have zero to do with ’80s TV or the modern feminist workplace and lots to do with faux-family members banging each other. The existence of more generally incest-themed porn like that featured on My Family Pies makes it even more likely that MILF porn is interpreted by viewers as incestuous. It would be a stretch to say that MILF porn is not understood as a part of this broader genre without a plausible explanation for why this is the case. The context suggests that



Oedipus Rex, Max Ernst, 1922

contrary to Lehmiller’s assertion, MILF porn is about moms in the familial sense of the word.

While this graphic offers a snapshot, it doesn’t capture the full extent of explicitly MILF- and incest-themed porn on the internet. Top channels like Let’s Doe It may not focus exclusively on MILF-porn, but they advertise it first on their list: “Stepmoms, threesome sessions, hard rough sex—letsdoeit.com has it all!” Porn star Alex Adams does not appear in the table, but he makes a porn series called “Mom Comes First” and another called “Family Therapy XXX.” His video “Mom and Step Son’s Late Night,” which has 98.5 million views on Pornhub—roughly equivalent to the viewing audience of the Superbowl—is filled with dialogue explicitly role-playing the mother-son relationship of the two actors and the secret and taboo nature of their encounter.

Adult entertainers and models on social media platforms like OnlyFans have caught on to the demand for MILF-themed fantasies as well. Fifty-six-year-old Elaina St. James has been called “OnlyFans’ Favorite MILF.” In real life, she is a single mom from a conservative midwestern background. She knew nothing about MILFs until she read an article saying older women were making good money modeling on OnlyFans. That proved correct. She describes herself as in the top 1 percent of OnlyFans earners and her earnings claims have been fact-checked and corroborated by *Business Insider*. She has written about her experience as an OnlyFans model for *HuffPost* and for *Newsweek.com*. In the latter article, she said,

There is such a market for mature “MILFs” and I hadn’t known that previously. I have older fans, but my core fan base are aged 25–40. ... What I have found is that my fans generally have a fantasy about an older woman in their life, like a teacher from when they were younger or a neighbor. So sometimes I’m me, or sometimes I’m role playing as, for example, a “naughty stepmom.” I suspect these younger men are not going to date someone my age, but they like the fantasy.

St. James and I chatted for an hour via Zoom on November 2, 2023. (I reached out to four other online adult entertainers. One declined to be interviewed, two did not reply, and one agreed to an interview but failed to follow through.) She told me that performing a MILF role on OnlyFans is entirely demand-driven. It was never of interest to her personally and can even be off-putting. She told me, “I think men really want to get one over on their dads. ... You’ve got a hot wife, I find her hot, I’m better than him. I’m better than my dad. I have a bigger

dick. She wants me because I’m young and vital, look at how much I turn her on.” Her fans’ taboo fantasies sometimes make her uncomfortable—if the age-gap they want to roleplay is too big or if they want to roleplay in a way that feels too directly incestuous. “They want to call me ‘Mommy’ and I’m like *No*. Nope. You can call me ‘stepmom,’ but you cannot call me ‘Mommy,’” she says. “It’s too infantile. It’s too young. That really skeeves me out.” The market conditions she describes undermine critics’ assertion that Freud suggested these sexual fantasies to his patients. In St. James’s experience, her fans bring these fantasies to her, and she tries to redirect them.

According to Dr. Justin Lehmiller, the interest in MILFs has nothing whatsoever to do with moms. So much for Occam’s razor.

THE SCIENTIFIC STATUS OF THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX

“The Oedipus conflict remains one of Freud’s concepts least investigated outside of the consulting room,” according to Adelphi University investigators Lawrence Josephs, Nina Katzander, and Aleksandra Goncharova, writing in 2018. They are among the very few psychologists to test the Oedipal theory with experiments, not just case reports from clinical practice. Likewise, investigators Ogas and Smith observed in 2012, “Almost no academic research has been done investigating the appeal of MILFs.” Those sex researchers who have noticed the MILF phenomenon have not evaluated it as evidence for or against psychoanalytic models of the mind. An article appeared in the *Journal of Sex Research* in 2014, for example, titled “Schoolgirls and Soccer Moms: A Content Analysis of Free ‘Teen’ and ‘MILF’ Online Pornography.” The article did not consider the Oedipus hypothesis to explain its data. Academic psychology and psychiatry have in recent decades favored meticulous description over hypothesis-testing, and if they’re going to test any hypothesis, it’s usually not a psychoanalytic one.

This is partly because Freud’s critics have succeeded in stigmatizing psychoanalytic ideas as categorically “unscientific.” Lack of adequate support for research by past psychoanalytic leaders, meanwhile, hindered the field’s response to this anti-Freudian propaganda. Contemporary psychoanalytic researchers now face real difficulty obtaining funding and publishing in mainstream journals because of this stigma. A 2015 article in *Psychotherapy Research* cited “decreased research funding, increased medicalization of mental health problems, and declining psychodynamic representation among research faculty” as impediments to psychoanalytic research.

But even if there were more psychoanalytic researchers, it's not clear they'd seek to investigate the Oedipus complex. Many commentators have observed that psychoanalysis itself has eschewed its former emphasis on sexuality in favor of attachment. Psychoanalyst Kaveh Zamanian has noted the general "decline of psychoanalytic interest in the concept of psychosexuality" and sounded Freud's old warning that people should be careful not to ignore childhood sexuality just because it's uncomfortable to think about. It's also unrealistic and puritanical *not* to think about. Perhaps it was psychoanalytic puritanism that drove Zamanian out of clinical practice to go open a bourbon distillery in Kentucky.

What about the 2018 studies by Adelphi researchers Josephs et al.? They used a technique known to social psychologists as "mindset priming" to test some of Freud's hypotheses about the Oedipus complex. The researchers had hundreds of study subjects read vignettes designed to unconsciously prime a certain idea or feeling, then had the subjects react to various prompts and looked at whether the priming had predictable effects on the subjects' responses to the prompts. So, for example, they had one group of subjects read a vignette about a child walking in on their parents kissing in their bedroom—colorfully labeled the "Oedipal loser" vignette. A "spousal betrayal" vignette described a man or woman discovering their spouse committing an infidelity. A control group vignette described someone entering the kitchen to discover their roommates making breakfast.

Based on Freud's Oedipal hypothesis that children of a certain age experience relations with their parents as a sort of "love triangle," the researchers predicted that people would react to the first vignette much as they would to the vignette about adult infidelity, with feelings of jealousy and disapproval of adult infidelity. Their predictions proved correct, and their results were published in *Psychoanalytic Psychology* in 2018.

ACADEMIC FRAUD

Freud-bashers and denial-deniers within and without psychoanalysis are not so easily convinced, however. They'll go to astonishing lengths to protect their fantasy that the Oedipus complex is, as climate deniers say, a "hoax," a relic, a myth that needn't be taken seriously. A 2019 article in *Psychodynamic Psychiatry* titled "Freud's Clinical Theories Then and Now," for example, comes dangerously close to academic fraud in its misrepresentation of the scientific status of the Oedipus complex. Purportedly written from a psychoanalytic point of view, the article makes the false claim that "75 years of research" have led psychoanalysts to abandon the Oedipus theory:

With the aid of over 75 years of research since Freud's death, today's psychodynamic-orientated clinicians have discarded many of Freud's tenets related to the Oedipus complex. Modern psychoanalysts have fo-

cused their attention instead on a patient's personal relationships in their early life, their current life, and in their interactions with their therapist (transference).

Seventy-five years of research on the Oedipus complex! That's a lot of data! Let's take a look at it! The author provides only a handful of citations to back up his bold claims: review articles by Jonathan Shedler, Rebecca Curtis, and Drew Westen, respectively, and the 1996 book-length review of psychoanalytic studies by Fisher and Greenberg, *Freud Scientifically Reappraised*. He can't point to a single study that has disproved the Oedipus complex. A closer look at the reviews he cites is even more damning; none support the author's claims and several directly contradict them. Shedler and Curtis do not mention the Oedipus complex at all in their reviews. The general thrust of their articles is that Freud's core ideas are testable and have been confirmed. Westen exclusively discusses studies that support the Oedipal theory. Here's what Westen has to say about one of them:

Watson and Getz (1990) asked parents of children ages 3–6 to record over a 7-day period the number of affectionate and aggressive acts they displayed toward their same- and opposite-sex parents. Supportive of Freud's [Oedipal] theory, affection toward the opposite-sex parent and aggression toward the same-sex parent were significantly more common than the reverse.

Far from declaring the Oedipus complex a psychoanalytic relic, Westen describes it as one of five "central tenets" of psychoanalysis and provides statistics suggesting that the majority of psychoanalytic practitioners concur. A survey he conducted showed "a surprising amount of agreement" about the five tenets.

Fisher and Greenberg's review raises questions about aspects of the Oedipus theory and suggests modifications to the way the theory is applied in clinical practice, but it explicitly affirms the core elements of Freud's Oedipal theory:

Let us make one last pass at Freud's Oedipal schemata. His formulations in this area are of anfractuous intricacy, and the findings pertaining to their validity are equally complex. Although the data support the basic notion of the Oedipal triangle and the existence of certain mechanisms to cope with the tensions created by Oedipal confrontations, they failed to corroborate other major features. The evidence ... disputes the widespread inclination of psychoanalytic clinicians routinely to trace their patients' symptoms and difficulties to defects in Oedipal relationships.

Since Freud's time, psychoanalysts have indeed broadened

their understanding of attachment, conscience development, symptom formation, and treatment well beyond the confines of Freud's initial formulations. Psychoanalysts have not, however, come to any kind of consensus discarding the Oedipus complex. According to Westen, it remains a central tenet of psychoanalysis that alongside loving feelings, children sometimes have forbidden sexual and aggressive feelings toward their parents, that these conflicting feelings may be influential and symptomatic, and that they may persist as mental traces in adulthood, expressed at varying levels of consciousness.

Psychoanalysts have retained these ideas for a very simple reason, and it's not because they're all brainwashed by Freud. It's because the ideas correlate to the observed reality of clinical and introspective experience. The ideas are furthermore beginning to be proved by experiment, including the grand natural experiment of the internet. To put it more concisely, the ideas are correct.

Repeat a lie often enough and people start to believe it—especially if the lie is something they desperately want to believe: "the climate crisis is a hoax"; "Freud has been discredited"; and "MILFs are sexy because of feminist advancements in the workplace." The world is so much simpler, healthier, safer, and cleaner when looked at without functioning eyes! Like Freud, Oedipus was really onto something. ■

Austin Ratner is editor in chief of TAP and author of the book The Psychoanalyst's Aversion to Proof.

FURTHER READING:

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BEST OEDIPAL FILMS

Back to the Future (Zemeckis 1985)

Beau Is Afraid (Aster 2023)

Blue Velvet (Lynch 1986)

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (Gondry 2005)

Hamlet (Zeffirelli 1990)

Luna (Bertolucci 1979)

Murmur of the Heart (Malle 1971)

Rushmore (Anderson 1998)

Spanking the Monkey (Russell 1994)

The Graduate (Nichols 1967)

To Die For (Van Sant 1995)



Beau Is Afraid (2023), Roadshow/A24



Can Psychoanalysis Save Marriage? And When Should It?

BY ENRICO GNAULATI

Illustration by Sarah-Jane Crowson

HOW DO WE approach patients who are experiencing a downturn in their marriage, or marriage-like commitment, even a desiccation of love? How do we help them differentiate between a harbinger of dissolution and a rough patch to be endured with the hope of restoring vital intimate bonds? The thornier issue I'll tackle pertains to whether there are occasions when therapists have an ethical responsibility to challenge patients bent on pursuing a divorce, even to engage them in ways that hold promise for intimate bonds to be restored. This would entail an analytic attitude that deviates from the disenchanted one baked into the title of Stephen Mitchell's acclaimed book, *Can Love Last? The*

Fate of Romance Over Time. It would beckon a more enchanted titular analytic attitude: *Love Can Last: The Promise of Romance Over Time*.

Perusing the history of definitions of love and marriage in the psychoanalytic literature, it's difficult to discern whether we are invited into a psychic world of realism or cynicism. Freud once compared human relatedness to the "Hedgehog's Dilemma," an analogy he borrowed from German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. Hedgehogs need to huddle to stay warm. However, given their sharp quills, close proximity guarantees pain. There's a perennial dilemma of having to get close to stay warm, but in the process, calibrating the degree of closeness to avoid harm.

Freud elucidated another dilemma nested in intimate relationships that appears inescapable for many people—combining loving and lustful feelings for the same person over the long haul. Here’s how he characterized the conundrum: “Where they love, they have no desire. Where they desire, they cannot love.” This theme was taken up by Stephen Mitchell in his aforementioned book—released posthumously on Valentine’s Day, 2002—and was mined more deeply by Esther Perel in her wildly popular book *Mating in Captivity*. In a nutshell, these writers lend credence to the notion that love and desire work at cross purposes. The very conditions that foster love—safety, security, predictability, familiarity, and comfort—can desex a marriage. That’s because erotic desire thrives on novelty, adventure, mystery, and danger. Mitchell summed up his disenchanted view of lasting intimacy as follows: “Authentic romance is hard to find and even harder to maintain. It easily degrades into something else, much less captivating, much less enlivening, such as sober respect or purely sexual diversion, predictable companionship, or hatred, guilt, and self-pity.” Not surprisingly, in other publications Mitchell referred to marriage as a “hazardous arrangement,” predicated on his belief that robust attachments in adulthood may afford security but are “the great enemy of eroticism.” Perel claims that the countervailing nature of love and lust is such that it is a “paradox to be accepted, not a problem to be solved.”

It’s indisputable that individuals sometimes experience committed relationships as a lackluster partnership with a trusty mate who is always there, leaving them to vigorously tamp down their sexual predilections, or outsource them with affairs. Just because people experience this paradox in their relationships, however, doesn’t mean they must permanently accommodate to it. I would argue that such feelings are in fact life-phase dependent and changeable. We forget how commonplace it can be in the long arc of a marriage, or marriage-like commitment, for the relationship to morph in and out of being vitalizing and devitalizing, both sexually and nonsexually. A great many couples drift apart due to benign neglect that is an unintended consequence of being hyper-responsible parents and dutiful careerists. William

Doherty, Professor of Family Social Science at the University of Minnesota, offers a simple axiom: “The biggest threat to a good marriage is everyday living.” It’s easier than we think for couples to fall into the trap of misconstruing unavoidable erosions in closeness and sexual intimacy—erosions that set in as a consequence of raising children, running a household, and pursuing a career—as signs of dire incompatibility.

We inheritors of Western civilization may still be marinating in sentimentalized Judeo-Christian notions regarding parenthood being the apotheosis of a marriage, bringing untold joy. This doesn’t square with the available science, at least as it pertains to new parents’ affectional bonds with each other.

According to statistics supplied by the prominent marriage researcher John Gottman, after the birth of a child 67 percent of couples experience a steep decline in marital satisfaction. Rather than limit ourselves to discussing the tension between love and desire that can creep into long-term relationships, perhaps we need to shift the debate to talk more about the unmistakable transitional phenomenon in which parents fall out of love with each other in the process of falling in love with their newborn. Freud happened to be prescient on this matter. In an 1883 letter to his then fiancée, Martha Bernays, Freud bemoaned the impending diminution of romantic love in their relationship: “dangerous rivals soon appear; household and nursery.”

Under duress, many married people, understandably, presuppose they will be happier divorced than partnered to their for-the-time-being-less-than-lovable spouse. Perel, in her sequel book, *The State of Affairs*, observes, “we no longer divorce because we’re unhappy; we divorce because we could be happier.” Zooming out, some research counters the prudence of this aspiration. A nationally representative survey spearheaded by Linda Waite at the University of Chicago tracking over 5,000 married adults over a five-year period found that, on average, unhappily married people who then separated or divorced were no happier than unhappily married people who remained married. Remarkably, two-thirds of unhappily married adults who refrained from dissolving their union rated themselves as happily married five years out. Along these lines, according to

“Does the therapist have an ethical obligation to help patients exhaust all possibilities before seriously entertaining a separation or divorce?”

the National Library of Medicine’s Premarital Relationship Enhancement Program data set, almost a third of divorced people regret having ended their marriage, believing that either or both could have worked harder to preserve it.

What are the ramifications of these ideas for therapists working with patients who are questioning staying married or partnered to a long-term mate? Taking the matter one step further, when the indications are that a marriage is mostly good, maybe even holding a dormant promise to improve over time, but is being construed by a patient as not good enough, even unsalvageable, what are the arguments for a therapist bracketing an *autonomy affirming* stance—on ethical grounds—and temporarily adopting a *marriage affirming* stance? In other words, in marriages, based on a therapist’s best judgment, where wholesome and romantic love once existed; any acts of betrayal or deception are potentially surmountable; and the couple is bound by parental and financial obligations—though going-on-being as a couple seems intolerable—does the therapist have an ethical obligation to help patients exhaust all possibilities before seriously entertaining a separation or divorce?

Traditionally speaking, psychoanalysis has anchored itself to an exploratory method aimed at greater client self-understanding. In his writings, Freud was adamant in positioning psychoanalysis as a scientific endeavor whose primary goal was the attainment of self-knowledge. He largely frowned upon any notion that it might be a method to alleviate human suffering. Indeed, he famously lashed out at his junior colleague, Sandor Ferenczi, for having a *furor sanandi*, or a passion to cure, perceiving such personal involvement on the part of the therapist as an impediment to achieving the objective mindset worthy of accurately dissecting the client’s inner world. In the 1916–1917 *Introductory Lectures* Freud opined, “We are not reformers but merely observers.”

In recent years theorists like Donna Orange have spawned an “ethical turn” in psychoanalysis, shedding light on how remaining neutral can be tantamount to responding indifferently to patients’ suffering. She has toiled to reimagine the therapist’s role as including the clinical/human obligation to render patients’ suffering more avoidable, bearable, and intelligible. Therefore, consistent with the ethical turn in psychoanalysis, in cases of a salvageable marriage, arguably, the therapist has a responsibility to hold space for patients to consider how they might be setting themselves up for unexpected suffering with blithe unawareness or willful ignorance of the hardship divorce can bring to themselves and their families. The rationale here is that by avoiding a separation or divorce a couple sidesteps some of the worst life stressors known to humans.

The Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale, used by doctors for half a century to rank stressful life events that predict illnesses in adults, places the death of a spouse or child at the top of the list.

Number two and three are divorce and marital separation. These are ranked more stressful and illness-producing than going to prison, sustaining a major physical injury, or having a close friend die. Divorce can also have unexpected lasting negative economic effects, especially for heterosexual women. Based on a recent analysis by *Fortune*, on average, once a divorce is finalized men retain 2.5 times the amount of financial resources held by women, and women’s household finances drop 41 percent. This is not to mention the behavioral and educational fallout experienced by children of divorce, detailed recently by Melissa Kearney in *The Two-Parent Privilege*. Speaking not as a moralist but an economist, she concludes, “Marriage is the most reliable institution for delivering a high level of resources and long-term stability to children.”

It goes without saying that in an irrefutably bad marriage, divorce can be nothing short of liberation from a form of trauma. But what about those cases where people assume divorce will be a tolerably stressful transition to a better life, when in fact it is likely to unfold as its own form of trauma, for some, or all, of the emotional stakeholders involved?

One of the leading causes of divorce is infidelity. A common psychoanalytic shibboleth is that romantic straying bespeaks attachment phobia or avoidance, or acting out of underlying intimacy problems. Doubtless, there is merit to this idea. However, a remarkable number of people who quest after extramarital sex or intimacy consider themselves to be happily or very happily married—35 to 55 percent—based a recent *Archives of Sexuality* article. Dylan Selterman and the coauthors of the research covered in this article studied a large population of what they cheekily refer to as “experienced and aspiring cheaters” who were active users on *Ashley Madison*, a website catering to those seeking extradyadic romance. They sum up their results as follows: “there are non-dyadic motivations for infidelity that stem from things like self-esteem, desire for variety, and situational factors, rather than from deficits in people’s marriages or partnerships.” This finding seems to confirm one narrative Perel delivers up about affairs: “We are not looking for a different lover so much as another version of ourselves.”

For a partner who has been cheated on, Perel adds, “divorce affords more self-respect than forgiveness.” But what if it is self-protective pride, rather than self-expansive respect, that governs decision making on the part of the partner subjected to infidelity? It is imaginable that an affair occurring within an otherwise good union was not a rejection or indictment of a marriage or marriage partner.

The ethical turn in psychoanalysis advises anticipatory reflection aimed at harm reduction, or sensitively engaging patients to see how rash actions may run the gambit from anticipated, intended harmful consequences to unanticipated, unintended ones. My position is more radical still. A fuller reckoning with



“Lovers who have a long history together codevelop a platform of relational safety crafted from years of jointly finding their way back from disappointments.”

what the ethical turn in psychoanalysis can deliver reaches beyond a focus on the mitigation of suffering to include the maximization of happiness. The lessening of emotional misery is a noble humanitarian psychoanalytic goal; so too is helping create the fundamental conditions necessary for happiness.

A newly released study overseen by Sam Peltzman at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business shows that coupledness is the highest predictor of life happiness, more than career success and accumulated wealth. Peltzman crunched the numbers yielded from the General Social Survey (GSS), a nationally representative survey of Americans implemented since 1972. He discovered that compared to unmarried Americans, those who are married have a 30-percentage point increase in overall happiness. Similarly, based on two large surveys conducted in the United Kingdom, economists Shawn Grover and John F. Helliwell compared married and unmarried cohorts and revealed that married people are more satisfied with their lives. This was true especially during the mid-life years, when adults' levels of life satisfaction typically are at their lowest. Added to this is a large body of evidence associating marriage with longevity, cardiac health, improved cancer recovery rates, and reduced depression. Due to legal marriage being a recent attainment for gay and lesbian adults, studies on their outcomes are sparse. That said, based on the 2013 to 2017 National Health Interview Survey, the odds of survey respondents reporting good health are approximately 36 percent greater among married gay and lesbian adults than among those who never married or were previously married.

In essence, I'm making a data-driven argument coaxing psychoanalysis to adopt a spirit of optimism about the happiness benefits of long-term marriages, or marriage-like commitments. If it were to gather metapsychological steam in the field, we would have to elevate the theoretical renderings of Virginia Goldner who in a 2006 *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* piece pushed back against Mitchell's bifurcated view of love and desire. She eloquently makes a case for the “erotic charge of mutuality,” and explicates how “attachment and sexuality could be catalytic rather than inherently opposed.” Lovers who have a long history together codevelop a platform of relational safety crafted from years of jointly finding their way back from disappointments. She questions the wisdom in an approach to enduring love that requires us to “find the foreign in the familiar to make love brand new,” proposing a different pathway: “It is not necessarily the (re)discovery of the lover—soulmate alterity—that turns the heat on, but the (re)finding of that deeply known person we love and need, and the thrill and relief of discovering that they are also reaching out for us, that turns the tap on.” Israeli philosopher Aaron Ben-Ze'ev echoes this sentiment in his ideas about “romantic profundity,” as distinct from “romantic intensity.” The former is a high-quality love molded over the years from

shared memorable experiences told and retold, friendship, and mutual sexual satisfaction. The latter is intensely passionate, pleasurable, and mood expanding, but ultimately short-lived. As Ben-Ze'ev would have us believe, the essential difference is between “fleeting pleasure and lasting treasure.”

Before ending, I'd be remiss if I did not mention the therapeutic value of certain psychoanalytic motifs for helping steer clients through stormy marital times. A staple feature of the psychodynamic method is to coax clients to appreciate the remarkable staying power of the emotional sensitivities they emerge out of childhood with: the unconscious expectations based on parent-child dynamics that get superimposed onto current intimate relationships; repetitive patterns of behavior that always seem to defy clients' best efforts to reinvent themselves and refrain from overreacting as if they were caught in a never-fading childhood trauma or source of emotional injury. Typical psychodynamic insights like “I am sensitive to rejection because I grew up with a father who was uninvolved” afford not just greater self-understanding but an awareness of a relational disposition that needs to be grappled with, since, unchecked, the disposition can place an unfair burden on current significant others. The more clients gain insight into the historical sources of their problematic relationship habits, the greater likelihood they will realize that divorce might not be a gateway to radically different future intimate prospects—because emotional sensitivities with historical roots tend to be relationally portable. Family-of-origin reasons for why you may be difficult to be married to, when humbly accepted, have a tendency to take the oxygen out of idealized fantasies of a marvelously different lover existing out there whose love will make you easy to be married to.

Not all marriages are alike or salvageable, and me taking a stand in favor of marriage preservation is not intended to cast judgment on those who have chosen divorce. That said, returning to the title of my paper—Can Psychoanalysis Save Marriage? And When Should It?—I'll say in the affirmative, that for many good marriages gone temporarily awry, psychoanalysis *can and should* bolster them by helping clients realize that (re)desiring the good that already imbues their abiding intimate relationships—rather than over-ruminating on better prospects that are imagined to be obtainable elsewhere—can help love flourish over time with bolder reciprocal investment. ■

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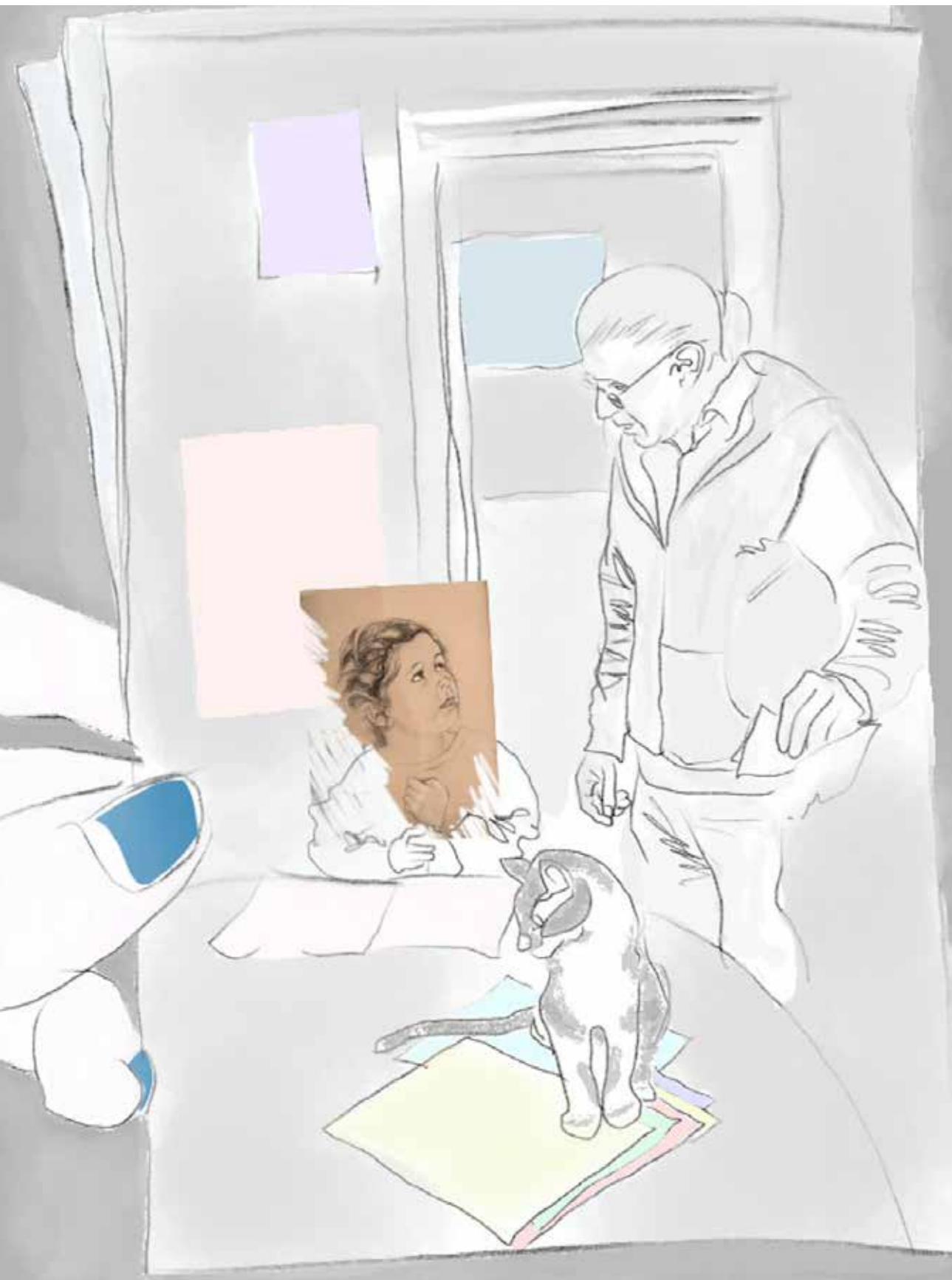


Illustration is based on author's photograph.

ADDICTED TO YOU

BY DREW VILLANO

Illustration by Tati Nguyễn

ON AN EVENING in 2011, my then-boyfriend nearly strangled me to death in my bedroom.

In the hours leading up to that moment, I argued via text with him about whether or not I was really working late. He often accused me of cheating on him and I was reaching my limit assuaging his insecurities.

At the time, I worked as a hostess at bars around Manhattan running video game nights. I was paid maybe fifteen dollars an hour plus free well vodka to sing any song or play any instrument on Rock Band the bar patrons wanted me to.

I'd previously given him a key, and he usually waited for me to return home from work. I texted him to not come over. I wanted to go home and slip into sleep.

When I opened the door to my bedroom, I saw the shape of his body in my bed.

I stood in my doorway and demanded he leave. He didn't turn to face me. I shook him, but he didn't turn to look at me. I slapped him in the head several times, then climbed off him and sat on the edge of the bed facing away from him, considering my next move.

He punched me in the side of the head and stood over me as I clutched my face, sobbing.

"You deserved that," he said.

He pushed me onto the bed and climbed on top of me, wrapping his hands around my throat. I realized I was not physically strong enough to remove his hands. I looked up at him and we locked eyes. I noticed he seemed very far away, like he was sleepwalking or daydreaming about something else. *Oops*, I remember thinking, *you fucked up this time*.

My pit bull, Cody, whose face I have tattooed on my hand, latched onto his arm. He let go of me to push her away, and I gasped for air.

I don't remember much of the rest of the night, only that I grabbed my phone, which he snatched away, pinning me down beneath the weight of his body. He whispered in my ear how much he loved me and held me there until he passed out.

The sun rose, shooting orange tendrils into my bedroom. When I woke up he was in the deep comatose slumber of someone who, though I didn't know at the time, had eaten a handful of Xanax and benzos. I slid out from under him, snuck

into the other room and called my mom. I don’t remember what I told her, but she arrived twenty minutes later and sat on my living room couch with her hands folded in her lap. I woke Chris up and told him to leave.

He left quietly, except that he said “fetch” when he threw the key to my apartment across the room.

Later that day, he sent me a string of text messages telling me he loved me, that he had been off his bipolar medication for almost a month, had ingested a bottle of Xanax (among other things) over the last day and a half, and planned to drown himself in the ocean near his parents’ house on Long Island.

For a year after the incident, I snuck him into my apartment.

FOR THE FIRST four years of my life, my father who raised me was incarcerated somewhere in upstate New York for selling coke and heroin. He got clean off both while in prison. After his release, he moved in with my mother and me in Brooklyn, where he raised me as a sober man from when I was four until his death when I was seventeen. He spent most of my high school years in the hospital, being treated for emphysema, the result of a forty-year, two-pack-a-day menthol cigarette habit.

By the time I was fifteen, climbing a single flight of stairs doubled him over. Clutching the banister, he wheezed and gasped for air. Instead of watching *The X-Files* with him like I used to, I visited him at Methodist Hospital in Park Slope after days at Brooklyn Tech. Sometimes an ambulance came to take him away in the middle of the night; when I woke up and wandered downstairs to ask what was happening, my mother demanded I return to my room. I didn’t know how to talk about his impending death, and I answered most inquiries about my parents with a blunt “My dad is dying.”

Once an avid picture taker who carried a disposable or digital camera with her everywhere we went, my mother packed her cameras away.

It was my senior year of high school when my mother

called me downstairs in our home and told me, “He died.” We exchanged a few placating words and agreed his suffering was over. I continued attending school, only taking a day off to attend his funeral.

That first Christmas without him, I gifted my mother a book about pigeons. My father had kept a pigeon coop on our roof. I hoped the gift would encourage us to talk about him. Instead she cried bitterly, saying nothing.

I committed to crushing every emotion that made me feel vulnerable. Ashamed of my own deep, undirected anger, I numbed my pain with Xanax and alcohol. Situations that triggered my insecurities about being abandoned, suspicion that I was unlovable, or fear that vulnerability might drive people away from me ignited a spiral of emotions I couldn’t suppress or control, and my friends knew me as someone with an explosive and unpredictable temper.

Despite my commitment to stoicism and resilience, I remained secretly desperate for someone else to tell me things were going to be OK and reassure me that I wasn’t alone. I convinced myself that if I didn’t have needs, or at least ignored them, I would be better off because I could never be disappointed.

And then I met Chris.

CHRIS TOLD ME that when he looked at the sky when we were apart, he was comforted knowing I was looking up at the same sky. When I looked up I didn’t feel anything. I fed our relationship most of the space and time in my life, so that I had none left over to consider what else I could do with it. By fixating on an *us*, I avoided acknowledging a *me*.

Most days we spent together, we drank and railed Xanax or coke or both. Suppressing what I saw as undesirable emotions exacerbated them and made me erratic; I lashed out one minute, then suddenly begged him to come over. He responded to my mood swings by promising he’d never leave me. Then he’d tell me I’d end up alone because I was too needy.

After ignoring me all day, Chris texted me in the middle of

the night to tell me what time he had seen my bedroom light go out from the street. I romanticized what I believed was his unique way of apologizing. I believed I, as an equally unstable and confused person who communicated via coded behavior and manipulative signaling, could understand his secret language. His actions, I reasoned, required more effort and time than a verbal apology and were therefore more heartfelt. Because I thought sacrificing things I cared about would signal he was important to me, I frequently canceled plans with friends.

I associated his promises with unconditional love, an illusion which I then saw as sacred and rare instead of as a threat to my individuality and independence. I relished knowing he’d arrive any time if I just asked—and I did expect him to drop everything for me when I suddenly felt pangs of loneliness. The more time I avoided myself and spent with him, the more of myself I suppressed. I created a cycle which culminated in a frantic need to ensure the relationship survived even if it meant I wouldn’t.

My recently deceased father receded further into the far reaches of my mind. I had no photographs of him and couldn’t discuss him with anyone who remembered him. To cope, I compressed his memory into a digestible, one-sentence narrative; anything more elaborate was too painful.

During breaks in our relationship, I convinced myself no one would tolerate me like Chris did. When he emailed or texted me—which he always did—I responded every time. But during periods of time we spent apart, I built a small business as a ghostwriter and quit working at the bar. Two of my closest friends moved in with me, and we spent mornings and evenings sitting at our creaky round dining room table, playing Bananagrams and listening to Robyn and Lil B.

I started therapy, where my therapist asked me to recount my life’s milestones. For the first time, I vocalized a record of events, which felt like treason against my family’s unspoken law of silence. Sometimes I found myself defending my mother or myself when I realized my therapist hadn’t yet responded—hearing my own story plainly outlined my family’s tragedy of human errors, neglect, and denial. Silence previously allowed me to avoid thinking about the story beyond the neatly packaged narrative I crafted and repeated.

Hearing myself make seemingly innocuous statements for the first time—like “I miss my father” or “I never discussed his death with anyone”—I saw, for the first time, the immense impact losing him had on my life, and how my ensuing solitude and lack of coping skills and guidance weighed on and influenced me. I’d distanced myself from my own emotions so much that I surprised myself when I suddenly burst out crying.

Even when I felt my worst, minor but impactful joys like hearing an uplifting MxPx song or eating a perfectly baked doughnut or laughing at my friend’s made-up song he sang to my dog filled me with hope and optimism. I was pursuing more pervasive joys, and realized this required me to trust myself to live an unpredictable life. I needed to accept that I could face conflict and adversity even when I didn’t understand what that meant or looked like. I didn’t have to do it “by myself,” as I was accustomed to telling myself; I had friends and a therapist and couldn’t predict who I would meet and connect with in the future as long as I made space in my life for those connections to form.

I could return to Chris if I wanted to, but our dynamic would remain the same. I don’t remember the last time that I saw Chris, only that I responded less and less to his texts, emails and calls, until finally, I didn’t respond at all.

LAST MONTH, in mid-September, I dug out a sixteen-gallon tub full of 1990s-era family photos. I realized that when our family photos disappeared, my mother had packed them into tubs and interred them in deep storage. Since my father’s death, the pictures sat neatly in their folded paper envelopes marked with a month and year. Since cleaning out the storage unit in August, I planned to organize them, sending away the rest to be digitized.

I sorted through the images on my living room floor. Pictures of my father and me together, which I couldn’t remember ever seeing before, surfaced unexpectedly. Us at my seventh birthday party, swimming in the pool at the YMCA; me sitting on his lap on Christmas Eve beside a pile of presents, embraced in a hug.

After prison, my father spent the remainder of his life making up for his four-year absence. But I didn’t know that until after he died; I only understood he dedicated his life to the act of loving me. Now I am commemorating my love for him by archiving these images as a way to remember the bond we shared.

I placed the picture of us next to the Christmas presents on my coffee table. An hour later I walked past it and, saddened by the image and annoyed by my sadness, flipped it face down. Later that evening, I turned it face up again. ■

Drew Villano is a Brooklyn-born writer whose work deals with family, relationships, loss, media, and internet culture. Her essays can be found at drew1111111111.substack.com, and her curated internet ephemera and public engagement at [@drew.normal](https://www.instagram.com/drew.normal) on Instagram.

THE REVERSAL OF HELPLESSNESS WITH DISPLACEMENT

A new psychoanalytic understanding of addiction

BY LANCE M. DODES

Illustration by Tati Nguyễn

ADDICTION IS ONE of the biggest public health problems in our country, but success rates in attempting to treat it have been very poor. A major reason for this is that the very nature of addiction has been misunderstood, mostly because it has been confused with the physical phenomena of tolerance and withdrawal seen with some drugs, phenomena which are also called “addiction.” Those physical symptoms are real, of course, but the question is not what effects drugs have on the body. Rather, the question is why people compulsively repeat their addictive behavior despite its ruinous effects on their lives. We know that the repetition is not just a question of physical addiction, even for drug addictions, because there are many drugs that are used “addictively” (i.e., compulsively, without rational limits) which don’t produce physical addiction (marijuana is an example). But even more important, people commonly switch from drug addictions to addictions that have no drug involvement at all, such as compulsive gambling, sex addiction, or compulsive exercising. This would not make sense if drug effects were the fundamental reason for addictive behavior.

In my clinical experience, addictions are neither more nor less than compulsions, psychological problems which we know how to treat. There are three major elements that I’ve found to be at the heart of all addictions.

I. Every addictive act is preceded by a feeling of overwhelming helplessness or powerlessness. The issues that lead to these overwhelmed states are unique to each person. That’s one reason that individual psychodynamic therapy is frequently the most helpful treatment for people with addictions.

Addictive behavior functions to repair this helplessness. It does this because taking the addictive action (or—significantly—even deciding to take this action) creates a sense

of being empowered, of regaining control over one’s emotional experience and one’s life. Drugs are particularly good for this purpose because they have the capacity to alter, and thereby reclaim control over, one’s emotional state. However, nondrug addictions (gambling, exercising, compulsive use of the internet, etc.) can be shown to work in the same way, since it is the ability to intentionally do something that will alter and control one’s emotional state that is important, not a physical drug action.

This *reversal of helplessness* may be described as the psychological function of addiction.

II. States of overwhelming helplessness produce a feeling of rage in response to having lost control. In psychodynamic terms, a loss of control is a blow to a person’s sense of power and importance. That is a “narcissistic injury” because healthy narcissism (valuing yourself) is under attack by the feeling of helplessness. The fury that follows this is likewise called “narcissistic rage.”

Narcissistic rage is something that has been understood for a long time. It is characterized by powerful compulsive urges to act and, while one is in the throes of the rage, tends to overwhelm one’s normal judgment.

These characteristics are identical to those that describe addiction. Indeed, narcissistic rage (at helplessness) provides an explanation of this well-known clinical description of addiction. And we can even take this one more step and say that it is *narcissistic rage at helplessness* that provides the drive behind addiction.

III. The final element in addiction is understanding why it takes the forms that it does. What does rage at feeling overwhelmingly helpless have to do with drinking, or gambling, or exercising? The answer is that each of these behaviors are *substitute* actions

“Every addictive act is preceded by a feeling of overwhelming helplessness or powerlessness. The issues that lead to these overwhelmed states are unique to each person. That’s one reason that individual psychodynamic therapy is frequently the most helpful treatment for people with addictions.”



done instead of acting directly to reverse helplessness. We call such substitutes “displacements.” For example, if a man were flooded with feelings of intolerable helplessness when he was unfairly criticized by his boss, and he regularly dealt with such feelings by drinking instead of some more direct or rational way to express his feelings, his drinking would (temporarily) reverse his feelings of helplessness. He might say to himself, “I can’t do anything about my humiliated and powerless feelings at work, but by God I can have this drink and make myself feel better and nobody can stop me! I’m in control of how I feel, not my damn work.” On the other hand, if, when he was criticized, he had instead marched into his boss’s office and made his case for not being criticized, he would have reversed his helplessness by this direct act. And if he had done this, he would not have had to have a drink. He wouldn’t have had a compulsion to act in a displaced way, driven by rage at his helplessness.

Addictions can in general be understood as displacements. That’s how we name them! This man suffered with alcoholism, but if he regularly used another displacement to reverse his feelings of helplessness, such as driving to a casino to gamble, we would change his diagnosis to “compulsive gambling.” The well-known ability of many people to shift from one addiction to the other is due to this essential nature of addiction. The “new” addiction is simply a shift in the displacement they are using.

PEOPLE ARE ALL different, of course, so what makes a situation lead to intolerable feelings of helplessness depends on the individual emotional life of that person. But when patients understand the psychology of their addiction, including the kind of underlying issues that lead to their feeling intolerably helplessness, two things follow.

One, they can predict when their addictive drive will occur, sometimes far in advance, and long before the addictive urge

is upon them. They can do that because they have learned the kind of things that will lead them to feel helpless. A good way to learn this is to look closely at the precipitants, the events that preceded the urge or even the thought to repeat the addictive behavior. These will all point in a single direction, which is the central issue with which the person has most trouble. And the second benefit of understanding addiction this way is that sufferers can (with some practice) discover better, more direct actions to deal with these issues.

As a result, patients can often bring their addictive behavior under good control even before they have fully worked out the issues behind it. Conversely, looking closely at the precipitants to each addictive thought enables patients to identify their overall emotional issues more quickly, since it is these central issues that lead to intolerable feelings of helplessness.

Naturally, there will be times when people suffering with addictions will need medical help, or brief hospitalization for detoxification. Residential treatments have been remarkably unsuccessful, and too often harmful by raising expectations (at a very high financial cost) despite evidence of their extremely low success rates. However, in dire situations, carefully selected inpatient treatment may be necessary.

But treatment with a knowledgeable psychodynamic therapist, who can help patients understand what drives their behavior and why, should be the backbone to dealing with this serious problem. ■

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BEYOND CLIMATE DEFENSIVENESS

**The role of psychoanalysis
in creating a sustainable future**

BY ALAN MICHAEL KARBELNIG

Photographs by Micheal McLaughlin

RISING SEAS, forest fires, flash floods, hurricanes, novel diseases, and collapsing food supplies dramatically illustrate the global warming problem facing humanity. The solution, if even possible, rests in our hands. We possess the knowledge, and the technology, to make changes necessary to prevent the climate from deteriorating further. Psychological obstacles, along with political ones, prevent us from implementing them. For that reason, psychoanalysis holds indispensable answers

to the dilemma. Psychoanalytic practitioners wield expertise in three specific aspects of psychology relevant to the global climate crisis: greed, defensive styles, and triangulation. These concepts carry the potential to significantly impact how global citizens deal with the changing climate. Myriad ways exist for psychoanalytic practitioners to join the cadre of climatologists, ecologists, and environmentalists already striving to address the approaching climate crisis.

Huangpu River, Shanghai



From left to right: Victoria Harbour, Hong Kong; Wan Chai, Hong Kong; Barcelona; Hong Kong

The Nature of the Firestorm

Most individuals throughout the world know about global warming. The 2023 report of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—a synthesis of 14,000 peer-reviewed research studies—presents these worst-case scenarios likely as soon as 2030: runaway heatwaves, droughts, wildfires, hurricanes, flooding, and unseasonable cold spells will occur with regularity. By 2050, global warming will create 200 million refugees. Half a century later, in 2100, the climate will warm by 8.5 degrees Celsius, destroying 99 percent of the world’s coral reefs, melting 80 percent of Alpine glaciers, and raising sea levels by three feet. The report’s authors believe insufficient time remains to prevent the extinction of half of humanity by then. Many will die of malnutrition, heatstroke, or dehydration; others will be killed by crop failures, mass migrations, and military conflicts. These terrifying predictions meet just as terrifying resistance to change in multinational corporations and political leaders who wish to avoid attending to the approaching crisis.

“2023 was the world’s warmest year on record, by far,” according to the National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration. Sea surface temperatures broke records and Antarctic Ocean ice receded to its lowest level in history. Weather events due to global warming now appear in the news daily. The climatic changes correspond with a new geological epoch known as the Anthropocene Era, a period defined by the environmental impact of human beings. Unless avarice-driven industrial processes can be slowed or stopped, the Anthropocene will end with the extinction of the species creating it.

The Problem of Greed

The ancient Chinese and Romans first discovered the energetic powers of coal. However, it was not until the early nineteenth century that the English and the Americans began aggressively mining it and, subsequently, extracting oil. Since then, petrochemical firms have developed ever-more aggressive means of mining coal and drilling for oil and natural gas. The burning of these fossil fuels for energy has made petrochemical corporations and their investors vast fortunes. It has also released enough heat-trapping carbon dioxide to raise temperatures on Earth significantly.

A similar process occurred in the domestication of animals for

consumption. Evidence of sheep herding goes back 11,000 years, and the taming of cattle, pigs, and poultry followed shortly thereafter. Paralleling the exponential expansion of the oil and gas industries, aggressive animal agriculture also began in the early nineteenth century. Inorganic fertilizers such as superphosphates came into use in the 1840s, allowing farmers to grow crops for feeding livestock on greater scales. Meat production companies have since developed more efficient ways of feeding, housing, slaughtering, and delivering animal products. Animal agriculture today produces most of the world’s nitrous oxide emissions. Nitrous oxide, also known as “laughing gas” in the dentist’s office, is a lesser-known greenhouse gas that traps even more heat than carbon dioxide does. While human activity produces less nitrous oxide than carbon dioxide, the former also plays a role in global warming. Runaway coal, oil, gas, and industrial meat production continues at unprecedented levels, driven by an insatiable greed which ignores its impact on the planet.

Psychoanalysts identified the problem of insatiable avarice early in the field’s history. In 1901, Freud observed how, because of our propensity towards

greed, we humans commonly “forget” or dissociate. We litter fields and highways without remembering how such behavior impacts others (or, later, ourselves). Petrochemical companies take this dissociative littering to another level, as they persist in excavating, drilling, and using immense, high-pressure, multistory fracking machines to pump water hundreds of feet under geological formations in an effort to extract every last drop of oil and gas. Well before introducing his tripartite model of the mind (ego, id, and superego), Freud traveled further down the road of exploring greed. He believed our biological instincts, taking form in the unconscious as drives, remain primary motivators throughout the lifespan. The paramount importance of our embodied status is captured by his famous phrase, “the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego”—an idea still considered relevant by scholars as diverse as psychoanalyst Jon Sletvold and neurologist Antonio Damasio. Equally famous is Freud’s 1914 description of infants who, free from the inhibitory effects of adult socialization, feel themselves to be “the center and core of creation—‘His Majesty the Baby,’ as we once fancied ourselves.” Some of Freud’s early


followers, notably Melanie Klein, also emphasized the power of such primitive forces. In her 1957 work *Envy and Gratitude*, Klein called greed “an impetuous and insatiable craving.”

Subsequent psychoanalysts, mostly from the Kleinian tradition, expanded further upon greed. In 1985, Eric Brenman proposed the phrase “greedy dependency” to describe how some patients, plagued by archaic greed, live “skin deep.” In other words, these individuals drain energy from others to fulfill their own needs. Their relationships lack reciprocity. These ideas map well onto the history of humanity’s exploitation of energy-creating natural resources during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The supplies seemed infinite, like endless mothers’ milk, and the effects of draining these chemicals from the earth were ignored. Contemporary psychoanalytic approaches, namely self psychology, inter-subjectivity, and relational psychoanalysis, tend to marginalize the impact of greed and its relationship to primitive drives. Instead, they highlight the human need for attachment. Mostly, however, psychoanalysts agree that some strands of insatiable primordial self-interest

remain, even in individuals who achieve high levels of maturity and individuation.

The Problem of Defensiveness

Psychoanalysts understand how, when people are frightened, their defensive shells harden. An analogue to the body’s immune system, the ego shelters itself from pain. In the late nineteenth century, French psychologist Pierre Janet first used the word “dissociation” to describe how mental processes fracture. In 1894, Freud, one of Janet’s students, first used the phrase “defense mechanisms,” extending the idea of dissociation. These protective cogitations arise, he thought, to defend against internal and external threats. In 1936, Anna Freud delineated and expanded upon ego defense mechanisms in her book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*. The concept of defense mechanisms rests upon the assumption that, when stressed, the mind creates partitions, much as submarines break into self-contained sections when attacked. Each mental subdivision has unique characteristics. Mature defenses like anticipation neutralize threatening information by motivating people to prepare. Sublimation channels discomfort from threats into productive

An aerial, high-angle photograph of Midtown New York City at night. The image shows a dense grid of skyscrapers, many of which are brightly lit with warm yellow and orange lights from their windows. The streets below are visible as narrow, glowing lines of light. The overall scene is a vibrant, high-contrast representation of a major urban center at night.

“Psychoanalysts may need to leave the quiet sanctuary of their offices to become involved in international relations—precisely because they possess the unique understanding of the power of greed, of defensive processes, and of the hope offered by positive triangulation.”

Midtown, New York City



Causeway Bay, Hong Kong

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“Many, if not most, global citizens are immobilized by fearfulness. Psychoanalysis’s first order of business may well be to focus on releasing individuals from such paralysis.”

activity. Other maneuvers like disavowal (conscious) or denial (unconscious) create still different mental segments. These various defense mechanisms are, essentially, varieties of dissociation. Humor, for example, separates out a painful experience by giving it levity.

Psychoanalytic insights regarding group psychology contribute to an understanding of ego defenses. In 1921, Freud used the phrase “primary group” to describe how groups acquire their own ego equivalents, noting that groups “have put *one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal*” (emphasis Freud’s). They consciously or unconsciously appoint a leader. Individual anonymity empowers these unconscious processes. Like Freud before him, Wilfred Bion, arguably the most significant contributor to group

psychology, describes how groups tend to project authority onto leaders. He writes, “having thrown all their cares on the leader... [they] sit back and wait for him to solve all their problems.” Perhaps such passive fantasies include beliefs that a leader, like Greta Thunberg, represents the promise of a messiah. Bion would consider such fantasies as representing group “depersonalization” and psychotic dissociation. Global society seems gripped by just this kind of depersonalized, psychotic denial when it comes to climate change. Of course, no real indication exists that Ms. Thunberg or any other leader will sufficiently motivate citizens around the globe to attend to the climate emergency. It will take, instead, a group consisting of much of the world’s population, certainly including many state and

corporate leaders, for real changes in climate policy to succeed.

Meanwhile, climatologists, meteorologists, and ecologists commonly bewail their audience’s ironclad resistance. In 2018, William Vollmann wrote, “Someday, perhaps not long from now, the inhabitants of a hotter, more dangerous and biologically diminished planet will wonder what you and I were thinking, or whether we were thinking at all.” Andrew Malm also mentions denial in his 2011 book, *The Progress of This Storm*, writing, “the higher the temperatures, the more conclusive the science ... *the more confident and belligerent the denialism will be*” (emphasis Malm’s). Despite the dissemination of ample information documenting the ecological situation, petrochemical companies’

persistent excavation processes proceed apace. Mitigation plans are so far ineffective. And those planning to build a civilization on Mars, a distant and hostile planet, ignore the self-destruction occurring on ours.

Triangulation as Psychoanalytic Fire Retardant

The more global citizens realize the scale of climate change, and how it will leave no individual or country unscathed, the more they can share a motivation towards a common good. Murray Bowen, an early contributor to the family therapy movement, first identified triangulation phenomena. Triangular relationships emerge, he observed, when a third person enters a dyadic relationship and influences the dynamic between the former pair.

For example, an adolescent child of a disengaged, argumentative couple may commit an antisocial act as a way of uniting the parents against himself or herself. Well before family therapy entered the scene, British object relations theorists identified the same phenomenon. Within the more recent psychoanalytic literature, triangulation remains a relevant theme. For instance, Beverly Burch uses the term *crucible* to identify how an outside event can alter a dyad.

How might the concept of triangulation be directly applied to the ecological cataclysm before us? The fact that people bond when united against a third party or entity offers a powerful political tool. Global warming, already acutely threatening, provides a theme around which peoples and nations could

cohere. The UN’s various efforts are positive but fail to address the problem quickly enough. And if psychoanalysts are to contribute to efforts to save human civilization, they must first transcend some of their own struggles.

Transcending Psychoanalysis’s Own Challenges

We psychoanalysts are not particularly prepared, or even motivated for, eliciting social change on a global scale. One barrier preventing the mobilization of our profession is the lingering infighting over theories of mind and method. A survey of the history of psychoanalysis reveals an embarrassing preoccupation with such in-house debates. In 2006, Lawrence Friedman complains of a “century of yapping dogfights.” Paul Stepansky



Mystic, Connecticut

coins the word “fractionation” and, along with Lewis Aron and Karen Starr, worries that psychoanalysis’s lack of coherence threatens its survival. These disputes drain psychoanalysts’ energies.

However, we all share a “common background,” as Robert Wallerstein has said, in our clinical practices. We create a transformational frame, bring our emotional presence to our patients, and engage them in conscious and unconscious dialogue, seeking to access and alter troubling unconscious schemata. Indeed, if psychoanalysis decides, as a discipline, to take on climate change, then triangulation against the common enemy of climate destruction may well overcome the unfortunate internal disputes plaguing psychoanalysis since its inception.

Applying Psychoanalysts’ Current Skills in One-on-One Psychotherapy

Psychoanalysts can increasingly expect to find themselves working with individuals who are fearful due to the changes in weather, water, and fire situations already unfolding. Even though events like World War II brought anxiety into households around the world, those citizens lacked access to the kinds of mass communications commonplace now. Information then was disseminated through newspapers, radio, and telegraph; in contemporary society, myriad methods of communication exist. Already, people around the globe nervously see and hear climate change unfolding daily. Some individuals may enter psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic psychotherapy because of these stressors. Those already in treatment may increasingly voice these concerns in psychoanalytic sessions.

Patients who sustained trauma in early childhood may find these events triggering; they often harbor unconscious affective memories, including states of terror, onto which these real events will be mapped. Along these lines, Ingmar Bergman’s 1963 film *Winter Light* features a character seeking pastoral counseling because he is projecting anxieties in his personal life onto the threat of nuclear war. A similar storyline about global warming appears in the 2017 film *First Reformed*, which was inspired by *Winter Light*. In this context, existential psychoanalytic approaches like Ludwig Binswanger’s and Irwin Yalom’s will prove increasingly relevant to clinical work. Climate writer and philosopher Roy Scranton believes we already prepare, at least unconsciously, for “death in the Anthropocene.” What could be more meaningful than applying existentialist concepts to patients’ global-warming-related anxieties?

In addition to addressing reactive symptoms, patients will require assistance in making massive lifestyle adjustments. The coming decades will bring increasing demands for adaptation. Lessening dependence upon, and ultimately

discontinuing, fossil fuels already approaches. Reductions in animal agriculture will likely follow. Changes in water and food distribution systems and housing will come next. These unfolding developments will elicit psychological problems while requiring mature capabilities for adaptation.

Applying Psychoanalysis Outside the Consulting Room

Meanwhile, psychoanalytic processes have applicability to broader political landscapes. Psychoanalysts *already* facilitate dialogue between different parts of minds and between different persons. Their work involves integrating layered, conflicting emotions. This work improves access to authentic thoughts and feelings; it facilitates patients’ abilities to speak truth to others. In 2020, writer Austin Ratner, today *TAP*’s editor in chief, along with coauthor Nisarg Gandhi, suggested in *Lancet* that psychoanalysts collaborate with epidemiologists in formulating public health messaging. Along these lines, psychoanalysts may need to leave the quiet sanctuary of their offices to become involved in international relations—precisely because they possess the unique understanding of the power of greed, of defensive processes, and of the hope offered by positive triangulation. Their work is similar to diplomacy, which is, after all, simply an extension of dialogue into the political realm. It is hard to argue against the binding effect a “shared enemy” has on individuals, communities, and nations. But first, nations must face into, and set limits on, the corrosive power of greed. They must break through their own systems of denial. The potential exists for nations to set aside even great political differences, like socialism versus capitalism, or authoritarianism versus democracy, and turn their attention instead to greater concerns like the real threat to human civilization posed by climate change.

The Paris Agreement of 2015, the 2021 Glasgow Climate Pact, and COP28 in 2023 represent some international progress, but they still fall short. Do we psychoanalysts even have a choice about joining the global citizens striving to prevent further climate change? With our expertise in greed, defensiveness, and triangulation, we stand poised to make a meaningful contribution to the survival of human civilization. We could explain, and publicize, how these concepts account for much of the climate crisis.

Psychoanalysts interested in taking a more activist stance will face formidable obstacles. Gerard Chrzanowski questions whether societies—already witnessing fires, floods, and unsustainable temperature increases—can possibly break through their defensive avoidance. In a 2019 paper, he wonders whether a “large group [can] formulate a meaningful response to an inquiry about itself when such a situation freezes the group with psychotic fear?” In other words, he suggests, many, if not most, global citizens are immobilized by fearfulness.



Middletown, Rhode Island

Psychoanalysis's first order of business may well be to focus on releasing individuals from such paralysis. Panic and avoidance can be superseded by enhanced self-awareness. Psychoanalytic practitioners already increase self-awareness in individuals, but they will need to scale up their work to societal levels. For example, these ideas could be introduced to organizations by organizational/industrial psychoanalysts. Further, psychoanalysts could help rally environmentalists through, for example, making presentations at COP meetings or speaking to other international climate change organizations.

Humanity's reaction of mass denial has an obsessive element to it: scientists report, meet, discuss, and observe—without any real action resulting. Instead of mass hysteria, mass obsessiveness occurs. Lacan suggests obsessives must be hysterical before psychoanalysis can begin. In other words, those who tend to hide their emotions behind walls of cognition require confrontations, followed by empathy, for feelings

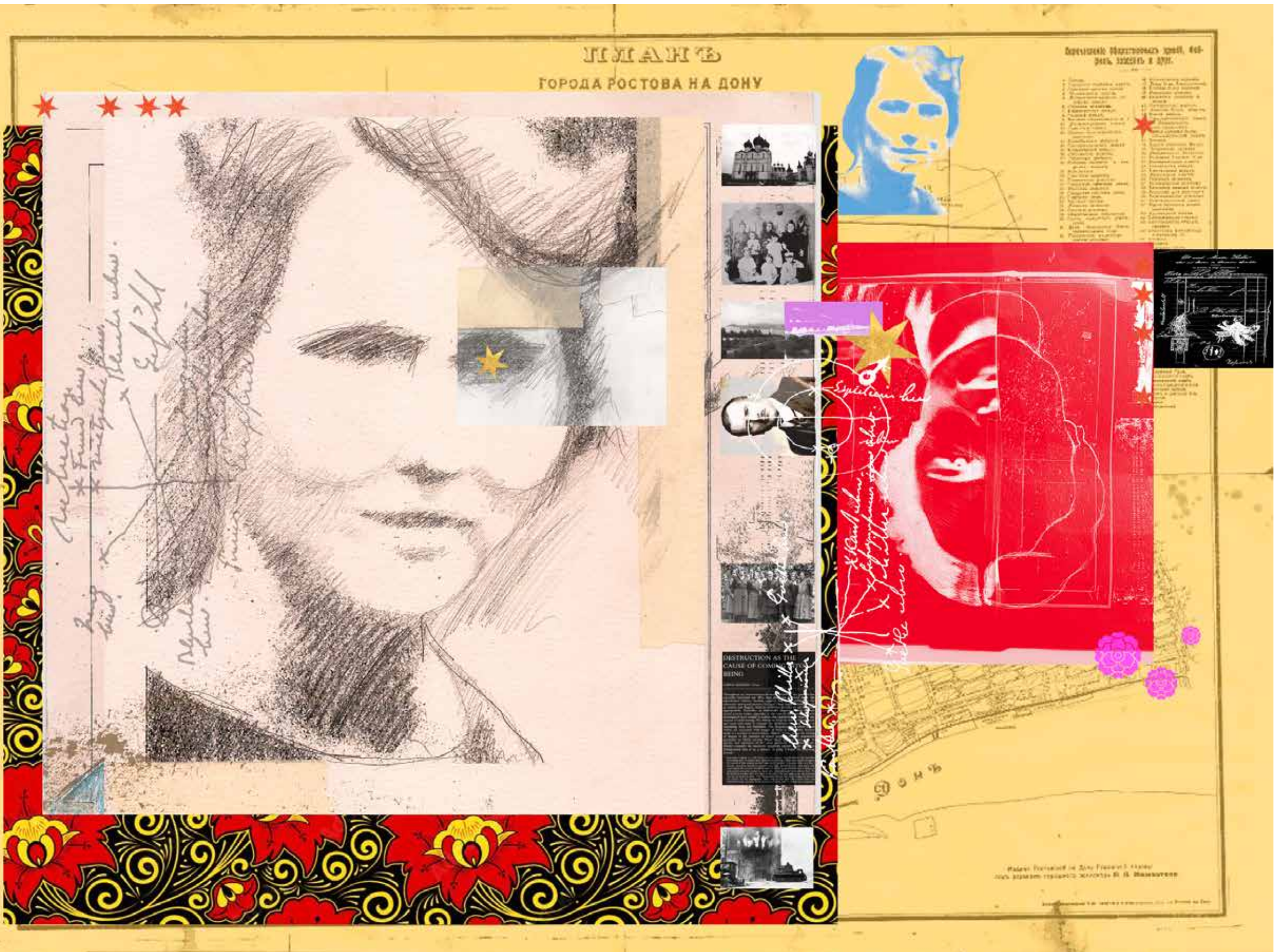
to emerge. Global culture requires the same treatment. If people drop their emotional ramparts and *feel* the pending calamity, they may begin to act. Here, again, lies a fertile field for applying psychoanalysts' capacities for dismantling defensive shields.

Psychoanalysis has immensely impacted Western civilization—remarkable for a discipline repeatedly pronounced obsolete. Words like *ego*, *resistance*, and *libido* are in common use. Even hard-core behaviorists acknowledge defense mechanisms, wonder what their dreams mean, and struggle with intrapsychic conflicts. This influence can extend to the fight against climate change. Psychoanalysts can make a difference in this problem. They can, directly or indirectly, help people around the world prioritize the planet from whose surface we spring like apples from a tree. They might write op-ed pieces, author books explaining how these psychoanalytic ideas relate to climate change, or even testify before Congress. Psychoanalysts can explain how the power of archaic

greed and defensive resistance can be managed. They can explain how positive triangulation can unify. These knowledge bases can be harnessed to inhibit our propensity to populate, excavate, and plunder the earth. Psychoanalysts can help to transform our terror as observers of a world on fire into a sense of empowerment to elicit broad societal changes. Psychoanalysis will achieve more than simply adding a few concepts to the international lexicon. It will positively impact the future of our species and of our beloved home: planet Earth. □

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Quincy, Illinois



THE UNTOLD STORY OF SABINA SPIELREIN

New translation provides insights into a key patient—and analyst—in the history of psychoanalysis

BY HENRY ZVI LOTHANE

Illustrations by Austin Hughes

IN APRIL OF 1905, a month before her discharge from the care of Carl Jung at the Burghölzli Psychiatric Hospital, nineteen-year-old Sabina Spielrein visited the University of Zurich and contemplated a return to normal life and resumption of her studies. She wrote in her Russian diary:

I was at the university. I have a pile of impressions but no patience at all to describe it. I was particularly impressed with the professor of zoology. I was passionately interested but presently a reaction kicked in and my heart is heavy again! I cannot become friends with the students; I am closed off from them; what they will see is the cheerful, superficial side of my soul but its very depth will remain hidden from all. It is somehow impossible for me to open up to these children, I feel that I am much more solid, serious, critically developed, independent ... But unfortunately, I'm still far from knowing whether I will be able to work scientifically: first, will my health permit it? And most importantly: will I be sufficiently capable? Meanwhile for me life without science is completely unthinkable. What else is left for me without science? To get married? But this thought fills me with dread ... I want a good friend to whom I could bare every little trait of my soul ... the love of an older man so that I would be loved in the way parents love and understand their child (spiritual affinity). However, between me and my parents it is as if nonexistent ... Well, if only I were as wise as my precious Jung!



It is this passion for science that became a determining drive throughout Spielrein's life, marking the start of the meteoric development of a sophisticated medical student into a mature pioneer of psychoanalysis.

Sabina Spielrein was the first child born in 1885 to dentist Eva Lublinskaya and merchant Nikolai Spielrein, followed by three brothers, Yan, Oskar, and Emil, and sister Emilia. Hers was a highly educated Jewish family that adopted the ideals of the Enlightenment and its Jewish counterpart, the Haskala, identifying themselves with Russian culture, language, and literature.

At age five the precocious Sabina was sent to a Fröbel children's school in Warsaw, where her father's family lived,

and learnt to speak German and French. At ages seven and eight Sabina "conversed with a spirit, an angel sent to her by God, because she was an unusual person," notes Bernard Minder. "She saw the angel as a good spirit that helped her and guided her. At first the spirit spoke German, then Russian. Often, she felt she understood the meaning of the words even before she actually heard them." These were daydreams and fantasies of a highly imaginative girl, prone to exaltation, idealism and *Weltschmerz*. At age ten she returned to Rostov and was enrolled in the girls' gymnasium (secondary school), where she studied Latin, took singing and piano lessons, was interested in biology, and expressed a wish to study medicine.

During this period Spielrein was periodically troubled in

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her relationships with her parents: both father and mother used beating in bringing her up as a form of discipline, then a time-honored method. During a confrontation with her father, she said to him that she could replace him with the company of other people, whereupon there was a big scene and the father got wild and threatened suicide. There were often scenes like this, sometimes lasting for days. When he was kind to her, she felt sorry that she was not kind to him. Despite such recurrent difficulties, she was an excellent student, graduating with a gold medal—a high academic honor—in 1904. But trouble continued that year, so the family took her to Switzerland. After a brief stay at a hospital in Interlaken, she moved to Zurich where the violent family scenes returned. Finally, the police intervened and delivered Sabina to the famed Burghölzli hospital where its chief Eugen Bleuler and assistant Carl Jung became her therapists. Jung cured her of her traumatic memories with the method of abreaction or catharsis—a way of discharging the emotions—treating her with understanding and patience. As of June 1, 1905, therapy ended, and no payments were made; Spielrein settled in a private residence in Zurich.

At some point between 1906 and 1908, Spielrein and her former therapist Jung started meeting in Zurich, conversing and practicing what Sabina called "poetry." In 1906, in his second letter to Freud in their historic correspondence, Jung mentioned Spielrein but kept her anonymous: "I am treating an hysteric with your method. Difficult case, a Russian girl *student*" (my italics). Thus, it was not true that Spielrein was still Jung's patient. Perhaps the fabrication was a sign of a guilty conscience. Freud responded in his fifth letter: "I can subscribe without reservations to your remarks on therapy ... Essentially, one might say, the cure is effected by love."

In the summer of 1908, in her third year of medical school, Spielrein was vacationing in Rostov and received a postcard from Jung dated August 27, 1908 in which he wrote, "Never lose the hope that work done with love will lead to a good end ... With heartfelt love, your J." Back in Rostov, Sabina received some good advice from her mother: "I received a letter addressed to you [and] opened it ... You have in him a person devoted to you, with a touch of love (more than that is *not permitted*) [her emphasis] ... Had you wished to cause him to divorce his wife ... he could be taken, but it is not worth it." No, Jung could not be taken, for he would not risk forfeiting his wife's enormous fortune. Sabina wrote back to her mother with a long passionate letter ending with a vow: "I will fall in love again ... I will find myself a husband ... in the future ... therefore do not worry. *So far we have remained at a level*

of poetry that is not dangerous, and we shall remain at that level, perhaps until the time when I will become a doctor unless circumstances will change [her emphasis]. I cannot feel happy without a mother's blessing, that is, without you approving my actions." As her later correspondence makes clear, "poetry" meant mutual expressions of tenderness in kisses and hugs.

The year 1908 ended with a heart-rending letter from Jung to Spielrein: "Will you forgive me that I am who I am? ... My misfortune is that I cannot live without the joy of stormy, ever-changing love in my life ... I need definite agreements so that I do not need to worry about your intentions ... Give me at this moment something back for the love and patience and unselfishness that I was able to give you during the time of your illness. Now I am the sick one."

On March 7, 1909, Jung panicked and once again referred to Spielrein in a letter to Freud as an anonymous "woman patient whom I pulled out of a sticky neurosis with unstinting effort [who] kicked up a vile scandal solely because I denied myself the pleasure of giving her a child." In German *Skandal* means a violently noisy scene whereas in English it means a public disgrace. After Spielrein disclosed his name to Freud, Jung insinuated that "She was, of course, systematically planning my seduction ... now she is seeking revenge. Lately she has been spreading a rumour that I shall soon get a divorce from my wife and marry a certain girl." However, in a letter to Freud of June 11, 1909, Spielrein portrayed Jung as the seducer: "Four and a half years ago Dr. Jung was my doctor, then he became my friend and finally my 'poet,' i.e., my beloved. Eventually he came to me, and things went as they usually go with 'poetry.' He preached polygamy, his wife was supposed to have no objection, etc., etc."

It turned out to be much ado about nothing. On June 21, 1909, Jung sent Freud "good news about the Spielrein affair ... the rumour buzzing around me does not emanate from her at all ... My ideas of reference ... I wish to retract forthwith ... Caught in my delusion ... my action was a piece of knavery which I reluctantly confess to you as my father ... You and I know of my 'perfect honesty' [English in the original]. I ask your pardon many times for it was my stupidity that drew you into this imbroglio ... I want to thank you for your help." On June 24, 1909, Freud wrote to Spielrein, "I see that I have divined some things correctly but that I have construed others wrongly and to your disadvantage. I must ask your forgiveness on this latter count ... Please accept this expression of my entire sympathy for the dignified way in which you have resolved this conflict." Poetry was continued both after the storm in 1909 and during 1910.

In December of 1910 Spielrein passed the written medical school examinations, in January 1911 passed her oral examinations, and on February 9 defended her dissertation. On October 11 Dr. Spielrein began presenting at the meetings of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society as the second woman to join the society. Freud wrote to her, “I fully appreciate your attitude and look confidently to the future.” In 1912 Sabina was again in Rostov, this time lecturing on psychoanalysis. There she met Dr. Pavel Sheftel. They were married in a synagogue later that year. In 1913 her first daughter Irma-Renata was born.

In 1911, at age twenty-six, Spielrein published her medical dissertation about treating a psychotic patient with Freud’s method, the first dissertation in psychoanalysis. (In contrast, her contemporary Melanie Klein began publishing at age 39.) In 1912 Spielrein published a long and complex paper, “Destruction as a Cause of Becoming,” in which she maintained, for example, that a woman dying in childbirth creates new life. She saw a similar motif in a woman’s fantasies of destruction during intercourse, or in Wagner’s operas, e.g., *The Flying Dutchman*. In 1912 she published “Contributions to Knowledge of the Infantile Mind,” in which she described scenes from her own childhood and observations in the analyses of boys, one thirteen and the other four-and-a-half years old. In 1922 Spielrein published on “The Origin of Children’s Words Mama and Papa: Some Considerations on the Various Stages in Language Development,” harking back to her thought about language at age sixteen (described below). In 1923 she published in French on “Some Analogies between Childhood Thinking, the Thinking of a Patient with Aphasia, and Unconscious Thinking,” cited in 1936 in a book by a prominent French historian of psychoanalysis.

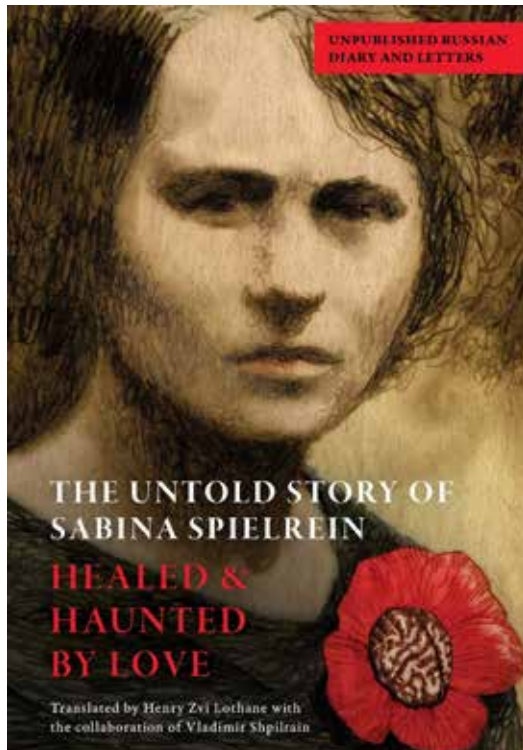
MY RECENT BOOK *The Untold Story of Sabina Spielrein: Healed and Haunted by Love; Unpublished Russian Diary and Letters* is the product of decades of research and translation. I first came across the private Spielrein archive of Mme Hélène de Morsier in Geneva, Switzerland, in the mid-1990s. There I was able to view Spielrein’s Russian diary and unpublished correspondence with Carl Jung and with Spielrein’s mother. In this book, I present these materials in English for the first time. The Russian diary runs from 1896

to 1925 and the letters from 1905 to 1923. The subtitle refers to her being healed by Jung during her hospitalization but haunted thereafter by her inability to stop thinking about him. Already in 1913 Freud had written to Spielrein, “I am sorry to hear that you are still consumed with longing for J ... I imagine that you love Dr. J. so deeply still because you have not brought to light the hatred he merits ... I can hardly bear to listen when you continue to enthuse about your old love.”

As a new chapter in the history of Spielrein, the book contains material unavailable elsewhere about her and her family as real-life people with their characters and conflicts; dreams, desires, and defenses; and dramas and destinies as shaped by the two world wars and the Russian Revolution. It is also a story about the scientific

achievements of her three brilliant brothers, murdered by Stalin in the 1930s. And the new material adds force to the demand that we revise previous damning accounts of Spielrein and appreciate her for her contributions to psychoanalysis instead of for her association with Carl Jung, which has been salaciously mischaracterized by academics, the mainstream media, and Hollywood.

The Russian diary reveals, for example, Sabina’s adolescent interest in language, which would foreshadow her publications on the topic and her precise literary and scientific descriptions. She “keeps imagining how [she] will grow up and be an adult



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—Sigmund Freud, letter to Sabina Spielrein, 1913

and let [her] children read [her] diary, how [she] will be a housewife,” nascent maternal and feminine feelings which would play a significant role in her relationship with Jung and her meditations in the “Essay on Transformation” and in published works. A sad episode was her mother’s plan to attend a physicians’ convention in Moscow and take Sabina with her, which the father peremptorily canceled; Sabina was deeply disappointed and “of course she cried.” This suggests an identification with her mother’s profession and an early interest in medicine. Another reaction was in a dream: “We were about to resume our travel ... I saw a dog spinning in the air ... I guessed it was a rabid dog and I knew it would attack me,” an interpretation possibly expressing her anger at her father and foreshadowing her future interest in dreams.

In 1901 she traveled with her mother and six-year-old sister Emilia to Austria and Germany, evincing great admiration for their people, architecture, cleanliness, orderliness, and manners, a stark contrast to Russia. This experience would explain Sabina’s unwillingness to heed the warnings (described in a letter to me by her niece Menikha) of Nazi atrocities and her refusal to flee Rostov. In 1942 Sabina and her daughters were among thousands of Jews murdered while the Russian city was under Nazi occupation.

Cut off from the West, Spielrein could not have known what Jung said on Radio Berlin in 1933: “the Aryan unconscious ... has a higher potential than the Jewish ... Freud did not understand the German psyche ... Has the formidable phenomenon of National Socialism, on which the whole world gazes in astonishment, taught them any better?”; nor about the concentration camps Dachau, Sachsenhausen, and Buchenwald; nor about Kristallnacht, the “Night of Broken Glass” in November 1938 when Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues went up in flames and Jews were murdered.

A more clearly existential topic in the letters between Spielrein and her parents and brothers was money. Sabina did not earn enough as a psychoanalyst to support herself and her daughter and depended on generous sums sent her by her parents. Asking Freud for referrals brought this response in 1914: “Now you are going crazy [*meshugge*] yourself ... and your argument that I have not yet sent you any patients! ... I have not seen a patient from Berlin for the last six months, or anyone else I could have sent on to you.” Jung’s response to her request was equally dismissive. Moreover, her parents and brothers constantly pressured her to return to Russia, for only there would she become financially independent. If such prospects existed for sometime under Lenin, all was gone under



A *Dangerous Method*, Sony Pictures, Everett Rex Features

Stalin, who outlawed psychoanalysis. Her fate was sealed.

My book also offers a corrective to a previous biography, Jungian psychoanalyst Aldo Carotenuto’s 1982 book, *A Secret Symmetry: Sabina Spielrein between Jung and Freud*. His book was based on Spielrein’s German diary and correspondence with Freud and Jung from 1909 to 1912 but was missing (1) letters from Jung to Spielrein (published only in German in 1986), and (2) Spielrein’s hospital chart, published in German by Bernard Minder in 1994. Carotenuto claimed that (1) Spielrein was schizophrenic and had a psychotic transference towards Jung; (2) that poetry was a secret metaphor for sexual intercourse based on “a literary analogy ... in Proust. Swann and Odette used the metaphor ‘faire cattery’ to express the physical act of possession.” Both claims were false, my research shows. Carotenuto was the main source for John Kerr’s influential 1993 book *A Most Dangerous Method*, where he falsely claims that Spielrein was a cause for the break between Jung and Freud. Thereafter, the sexual intercourse myth became a formula repeatedly and uncritically copied in the entire secondary literature about Spielrein, as I outline in the afterword of my book. For instance, in her 2015 coedited book, *Sabina Spielrein: Forgotten Pioneer of Psychoanalysis* (including my 1999 paper published in the *IJP*), Jungian analyst Dr. Coline Covington characterized Spielrein as “perhaps best known for her love affair with Carl Jung.” But

why was Spielrein singled out? Wasn’t Jung a paramour too, and an adulterer guilty of professional misconduct to boot? My argument against the commonplace misinterpretation of Spielrein’s relationship with Jung is summed up in the 2016 paper in which I conclude there was no patient-doctor love affair after Spielrein was discharged from the hospital, only a professor and a student, two young people in love, a relationship subject to a different code of ethics.

In 2011 the alleged sex affair became an inspiration for David Cronenberg’s film *A Dangerous Method*. Based on Christopher Hampton’s play *The Talking Cure*, itself founded on John Kerr’s book, it was billed as a historical film. But to me it is a kitschy sexploitation film, in line with a Hollywood precept: why waste a good story if sex is what sells films. Thus, Jung uses spanking as foreplay, culminating in sexual intercourse, as confirmed by blood-stained bedsheets. The film was both commended and condemned by reviewers in the press. An intriguing example is the review by Alan Stone, former Harvard professor of psychiatry and law, published in *Psychiatric Times* in 2012: “The critics are giving it thumbs up for its achievement in bringing a moment in intellectual history to life for general audiences ... But what sent shock waves through the psychoanalytic community ... was the revelation that Jung had a prolonged affair with her, [employing] Freud’s dangerous method, the talking

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cure.” Stone’s enthusiasm for the film exemplifies many people’s reaction to it. However, his opinions do not meet the requirements of a reliable intellectual history.

In the opening diary entry above, Spielrein is yearning for Jung as a person with whom she desires to have a “spiritual affinity,” probably an allusion to Goethe’s famous novel *Elective Affinities* (*Wahlverwandschaften*), in which he viewed interpersonal relations between man and woman as analogous to chemical reactions. Whereas Spielrein and Jung experienced mutual erotic attraction, it appears that, contrary to popular belief, both exercised control over their passions. On the other hand, spiritually—as patient and doctor and later as teacher and student—they shared many philosophical and psychoanalytic ideas. For instance, Jung was indebted to Spielrein as the creator of the concept of destruction as a cause of becoming and transformation. ■

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A SOCIAL WORKER CONFRONTS THE COSTS AND EXCLUSIONS OF PSYCHOANALYTIC PRACTICE

BY MIKE LANGLOIS

Illustration by Austin Hughes

I STEAL MY FIRST book on psychoanalytic theory when I am fourteen. It is Karen Horney's *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* and I steal it from a bookstore in Worcester. I steal it because I can't pay for it and because in its index it has an entry, "Bisexuality, discussion of, 132 ff." (I have never seen me in print that way before. It is so amazing to finally see me in print that way!) I may never see a book like this again, so I steal it. I still have that book. Like most of my books I have from my teens and twenties it has my name on the first page, and page 77. Each book has two signatures, because one of the first things you learn from stealing books is to rip off the first page where the previous owner signed it. But no one looks on page 77.

Freshman year I read Horney, Freud, and others in high school study hall. We don't have psychology classes; I have gotten a scholarship to a prep school that describes its curriculum as "no frills." It is an expensive school and it's going to get me into college and my parents are paying good money to have me go there. When I get caught stealing books I can't say much, especially about bisexuality, so I get a job as a dishwasher for \$3.50 an hour because if I need to read so much, my parents tell me, I am going to have to earn some money.

I bus tables and scrape dried egg yolk off plates, which is why I can tell you we hate it when you stack your plates because although you think you are being helpful it means the bottom ring of the plate gets yolk on it from the plate underneath and we have to scrape twice as much. I become a nursing attendant my junior year. Washing people pays more than washing dishes. I get to talk to them too, and I like that.

property

“I’m crying because all you capital-P psychoanalysts are always going to think of me as a clumsy thief who needs more education and help getting dressed up.”

I am growing up in a small French-Canadian mill town. I never hear of “processing” experiences or emotions. So I don’t process the seventy-year-old man who punches me in the face when I walk in his room. I don’t process putting restraints on a crying woman who looks like my grandmother. That was just in one day’s work, but I am making seven dollars an hour now. I am reading Freud about bisexuality and getting punched in the face and I am in high school. I am sixteen.

I start working the 11-7 shift on weekends. No one hits you on the night shift because they’re asleep. I do my homework overnight. My sleep will never return to normal.

I get into college with a partial scholarship. I can take out a loan for the rest, they reassure me. I can go to college! I don’t give another thought about the loan and enroll in a psychology course first semester. I get a job writing for the school press office, another one as a tutor, then a third one working at a local pet store on the weekends. Now I can afford a laptop—an IBM that weighs a ton.

My scholarship is donated in the name of a wealthy alum who

died. The college makes me write a letter to her parents each semester telling them I’m grateful to be at college and describing how hard I am working. They never write back. Sophomore year I’m asked to come back early for student orientation. They put me on the Minority Panel to tell the incoming class what it is like to be a student on “financial assistance.” I don’t tell them I’ve stolen books to learn about psychology or bisexuality. I don’t tell them about signing on page 77 either—I’m sure I’m the only one who has stolen things here.

I meet with a psychology professor about grad school. I ask her what the quickest course of study is so that I can become a therapist. I can’t afford five years of clinical psychology, I tell her. I hadn’t known that it would take so long. She tells me I can get a social work degree in twenty-seven months! So I go to Smith.

Smith is confusing. The first day I am on campus I stand gratefully at the main iron gate and almost throw up. It is fancy and they have receptions where other White people talk about racial justice. When they do, my Black classmates are quiet and look uncomfortable. I’m popping antacids now, but we are finally talking about psychoan-

alytic theory. I know people want to be in private practice but they won’t talk about it in class. We are supposed to go into agency work, case management, or macro, one classmate from a place called the Upper West Side tells me. But that doesn’t pay much, I tell her, you can make good money in private practice, can’t you? She stares at me and I realize that I am now supposed to be ashamed about wanting to make money.

I’m already in more debt than anyone in my family has made in a year. I know better than to be difficult when my loan check doesn’t arrive on time, even if my credit card is maxed out. It is always maxed out. I am on my third car, a twenty-year-old truck I have to start each morning by popping the hood and pulling on an ignition chain. I’m often late to internship that winter.

I volunteer at a food pantry. They let me bring home a bag of groceries each week. One week I run out. A friend of mine who is also in grad school comes to visit me and shares her food stamps with me so we can buy groceries. We are in master’s programs. We are using food stamps. I am not supposed to want to make good money.

EDUCATION

Second year I will be working with adults, so I need to wear dress clothes at my agency. I don’t know what to do, I tell one of my classmates. She’s a fifty-year-old radical lesbian former lawyer from Connecticut who has talked about labor in a few of our classes, so I think she’ll be OK with me. Can I wear turtlenecks? Will that be OK? That weekend she drives down to Connecticut where she has friends who are still lawyers. She comes back to campus on Monday and presents me with two bags on the steps of our dormitory. Dress clothes. They bought them. For me. I start to feel ashamed but these women are smart. They have anticipated this. They tell me I can pay it forward someday. I promise. In graduate school I learn that gratitude is always accompanied by nausea.

I apply for jobs. I ask about salaries and no one will tell me an amount. Where I come from everyone knows what the minimum wage is. Everyone knows what the going rate is. I’m the first member of my family to get a graduate degree but I have \$60,000 in debt. How can I know if I can afford to take your job? I can’t pay things forward if I don’t make good money. I end up in a new mill town working with people who make sense to me. I can wear sneakers to work because I am going to the projects. My dress clothes still fit. I open a part-time practice because I have learned that part-time practices are OK if you have a real job. I can afford to shop at Whole Foods. I develop a taste for expensive stinky cheeses.

One day I am at the cheese aisle in Whole Foods, and I see a woman who looks familiar. We start talking about cheeses. Turns out her name is Goldie and she’s a Smith alum. She becomes a friend. I’m sorry Goldie, I never told you until now that I’m a thief and stole books but I couldn’t bear it. She gets me a gig supervising at Harvard Medical School. I don’t ask if they pay at the interview. I am eating stinky cheese and supervising people at Harvard Medical School.

I start working with video games in therapy. I am using Nintendo 64 games to help motivate kids in special education. Goldie and other people say I should go get a doctorate. I am now \$90,000 in debt. I have ideas and I work for Harvard Medical School for free and I am \$90,000 in debt. I cannot afford to go for a PhD. If I attend a psychoanalytic institute I won’t be able to work for Harvard Medical School for free. But I can afford to do some courses. I buy books now, and a website and a blog.

I start blogging twice a week about gaming, technology, and therapy. Sometimes I even dare to talk about class, ask why the “tech guy” is always in the basement room without windows. Someone asks me to present at a conference, and then another. They do not pay me. I take my blog posts and edit them. Here, I say, I liked thinking and talking about gaming and psychoanalysis so much that I wrote a book about it.

I do not have a doctorate but I have some ideas. I publish the book on Amazon.

I SPEND \$200 ON these postcards when I am presenting at a Harvard Medical School conference. This is where I meet you, my psychoanalytic colleague, stationing a table selling books. I come over and tell you that I have an e-book and ask since I am presenting today if I could leave a stack of these postcards with my book info next to the other presenters’ books. You say, unfortunately you can’t. For the next several presentations, for the next decade, you say I can’t put my postcards there. I keep them in a bag in my basement.

I’m reminded of this at a psychoanalytic conference in New York City. My supervisor has encouraged me to attend. I pay good money to work with her and she is worth every cent. I sit next to her during a session on race, class, and fees. Something comes up in the session about debt. My heart is beating. I take the hotel pen and scribble \$126,000 on my notepad and show it to her. I immediately regret that I did. The next day we go out for lunch. I tell her I think I need to talk to her about my class history at our next appointment, but of course not now.

But then we are talking about the postcards. And I am crying and realizing, shit, I am “processing” things. I’m in Le Pain Quotidien in Midtown Manhattan and I’m processing things. I’m probably going to write about it, and then this woman who supports my writing, read my book, she’s going to read this and then she is going to know that I’m a thief who stole books. And I’m crying because all you capital-P psychoanalysts are always going to think of me as a clumsy thief who needs more education and help getting dressed up.

Which always brings me back to this book table and to you, browsing colleagues. I paid to join your psychoanalytic association. I keep seeing you year after year, and I still have these postcards. I can’t get rid of them. I paid good money for them.

I have paid for many of these ideas, stolen others, but some of them are mine. I think they are worth something—to me, to you, to us. Yes, I was a book thief, but I wrote one to pay you back. Can we get less certain about who owns things and who belongs where? I’m not sure I’m grateful any more, but I know I’m not nauseous. Are you certain there is no room for me there? Are you sure? ■

Mike Langlois, MSW, has over 30 years of experience practicing psychotherapy with adults and families and is slowly getting better at it. He is the author of Reset: Video Games & Psychotherapy and a teaching associate in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School.



ON FEAR OF HOPE

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROSS ELLENHORN

Photographs by Ian Campbell

ROSS ELLENHORN is a sociologist and clinical social worker who has developed an innovative treatment program for psychiatric and psychosocial recovery which bears his name: Ellenhorn. Influenced by current research on “psychosocial resources” in social psychology, Kurt Lewin’s work in field analysis, psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott’s theories on play, and the “community integration” model of psychosocial rehabilitation, Ellenhorn’s model is an intensive “treatment without walls” approach to helping individuals experiencing complex events of mind and mood and problematic habits. Instead of removing suffering people from society, Ellenhorn sends clinicians out into the field to accompany them in their daily lives. The goal is not simply symptom reduction, but something its founder believes is

more complex and difficult to achieve: “the recovery of a person’s social being.”

Ellenhorn told *TAP* editor in chief Austin Ratner that the origins of the program lie in his personal history. When in junior high in Claremont, California, he’d been assigned to special ed classes, an experience he found “profoundly labelling.” He was eleven years old and thought to himself, “I’m not gonna be able to make it as an adult.” That kind of demoralizing identification—“a spoiled identity,” as Ellenhorn describes it, referring to the work of sociologist Erving Goffman—“was more debilitating for me, and caused me more problems for decades, than any so-called disability.” He describes the Ellenhorn program as a “memorial to that traumatic event.”



The “unsaid event in most treatment settings,” Ellenhorn says, is an injury to patients’ sense of hope. “Their chief complaint is ‘I’m afraid of trying again.’” Ellenhorn calls this “fear of hope” and aims his program at providing enough external support to overcome it so that a patient can recover the ability to “metabolize help.” “That’s the gold,” says Ellenhorn, “and once a person develops a better relationship with help, the world is an oyster as far as what’s next treatment-wise. Whether they see a psychiatrist or a shaman, they’re basically ready to change.” Helping people build better relationships with help is central at Ellenhorn. “If somebody comes into a session with one of the clinicians and says, ‘that thing you said last week, I’ve applied it and it really helped,’

they’re done with us. They don’t need the ‘hospital without walls’ we provide, because they can be effective leaders in their recovery.”

Ellenhorn has written three books on his philosophies: *Parasuicidality and Paradox: Breaking Through the Medical Model, How We Change (and the Ten Reasons We Don’t)*, and *Purple Crayons: The Art of Drawing a Life*. Ellenhorn and Ratner met twice in December 2023, once via Zoom and once in person, and corresponded via email. They discussed fear of hope, Ellenhorn’s work with individuals labeled “difficult to engage” or “resistant,” the current problems with treatment for mental health and addiction, and the importance of the social context for recovery.

WORK

AUSTIN RATNER: Addicts are often said to be in denial about their problem, and sometimes the approach to treatment is to attempt to break through that denial to the truth that the patient or client is an addict. But you’ve pointed out that there’s a stigma that goes with being labeled an addict. And when you’re labeled as different and the treatments provided don’t seem to work, you can give up hope and collapse back into addiction. So how do you help people out of this conundrum?

ROSS ELLENHORN: First of all, let me clarify that Ellenhorn isn’t an addiction treatment program, per se. We work with people who are often called “dually diagnosed,” meaning they both experience difficult events of mind and mood and are engaged in a problematic habit. But I am happy to talk about addiction, independent of mental health concerns, since I believe a lot of our core philosophy applies to the issue. To start with, we need new words for “resistance” and “denial,” since work in the addiction field is completely oriented toward breaking through these supposed skull-bound events. While it’s completely ineloquent, I like the term “perturbed relationship with help.” And I believe people will not develop a facilitative relationship with help if they don’t have the right psychosocial resources. Or, to put it another way, what’s called “resistance” or “denial” isn’t just a “what’s wrong with them” problem. It’s as much, and I believe more so, a “what’s happening to them” issue.

To get people ready for treatment is to get as warm a coat of social resources around them as possible. If I’m right about that, that’s a giant missing element in most care, right? Most care for addiction and for complex psychiatric events removes people from these resources, often removing them from home and structuring their days around treatment and away from social resources. Over and over, research in social psychology shows that if someone doesn’t have a sense of self-efficacy, if they don’t have good social support, if they don’t have purpose, the world becomes threatening. And I do believe there’s a thing called denial, but to fight through denial means to face a challenge not a threat. A *challenge* is an obstacle we have the resources to deal with. A *threat* is an obstacle we don’t feel we have the resources to deal with. And for someone without good psychosocial resources, what might appear for some of us as challenges feel like threats. At Ellenhorn, we’re trying to bolster up the ability for people to be motivated and connected because I’m pretty sure psychosocial resources are the elements that actually get somebody that’s called, quote, unquote, “difficult to engage” to engage in treatment. That’s why over 70 percent of our work is done outside the office, on an outreach basis, and a lot of it is about helping people get back to work or school, or engage in activities in their community. The majority of the people we work with at Ellenhorn have experienced profound traumas to their social experience, having lost a sense of their social role, their purpose, their competence and their social supports, due to going in and out of treatment. We actually call

our clients who engage in problematic habits “triply diagnosed,” because we think their addiction issues are as tied to what we call “psychosocial trauma” as they are to their mental health issues, and the research on dual diagnosis work points in this direction.

So how do you get people to that? I think it happens through people building faith in themselves again. “I’m strong enough to handle this.” You can’t help a person get more hope, but you can help them feel, “I can see the challenge in this next task, and it’s not a threat,” and “If this goes wrong I’m still gonna be standing here.” Does this person have faith in themselves and others to get through this and are they able to be innovative when they face a problem in front of them? Both those things require some level of faith in yourself, and so how do you rebuild a person’s faith so they can look at their problems and decide what they want to do with their life?

AR: Say more about what you mean by fear of hope in the context of addiction.

RE: Hope is not the same as optimism. Optimism is kind of like Reaganesque nonsense. Like “Everything’s gonna be great! Great day tomorrow!” Hope is the capacity to move towards something you yearn for despite uncertainty. So every time that you’re able to keep going despite not knowing whether you’ll get the thing or not, you’re hoping. And so hope is central to motivation, since every act of motivation is challenged by uncertainty. (This is what makes Martin Luther King probably the most profound thinker on hope—“creative suffering,” what a term! *Creative suffering*. It means in your suffering to still come up with creative solutions of what you’re going to do with it.) When you hope, you also make the thing that you’re yearning for more important than it was before you hoped for it, right? That means that if you don’t get what you hoped for you have these profound experiences of disappointment, and the other term for that to me is *helplessness*.

There’s this quote from Erich Fromm about how all of us are basically built for suckling, and that means we’re also always dealing with the possibility of disappointment. I think of disappointment in that way: as often a profound event in which we experience that our needs are not met, and from that that we are helpless. “I’m not able to meet my needs. I’m now lacking this thing in my life.” If you’ve been through this series of events where everybody was excited about your change—getting sober, getting good marks on your improvement on psychiatric symptoms, a professional stamp of approval about you “functioning”—and then things fall apart again, you start to think, “I don’t want to hope.” Even, “Hope is my greatest enemy. Because if I hope again, I’m gonna take those steps towards that event again where I’ll experience my own helplessness.” And from this, “Staying the same is actually my friend, in my battle against hope.” And that’s *fear of hope*.

We created a scale to measure fear of hope—it’s a legitimate scale, these are really good social psychologists that have done this—and the remarkable thing is that people that score high for hope and score high for fear of hope are the most agitated of all the different versions you can come up with. High hope and high fear of hope is like standing on a cliff and being afraid of heights.

AR: That’s where I live.

RE: Well, if you’re a hopeful person you’re always gonna be dealing with fear of hope. But it’s a good anxiety, it’s existential anxiety. Hope never comes without fear: it takes courage to hope.

AR: And you’re talking about fear of hope as an obstacle to change and as an obstacle to treatment.

RE: Yeah. Every time you go see your addiction counselor it’s like, “Oh, here’s that person who wants me to get better. They want me to get on that path again and—”

AR: “I don’t believe I can do it.”

RE: Yep and “I don’t believe I can deal with the disappointment if I do it and it doesn’t work. Oh yeah, it’ll be too much for me.”

AR: “And so therefore I’m gonna go back and just stay the same: continue to use, or keep a low profile as a ‘mental patient.’”

RE: Exactly! And what the person is doing by staying the same is actually rather graceful in its own way: they’re trying to protect their hope. They’re holding on to their hope. They’re saying, “I don’t really want this to get injured again, I got this hope here and I don’t want it to be exposed and hurt again right now and so I’m holding on to hope.” So what we see as hopeless behavior is actually hopeful behavior, it’s just that there’s such fear of hope that staying the same becomes the person’s guard. And until a person can develop some faith in themselves, some self-efficacy, they’re not going to take the risk of dashed hope again.

I learned it through psychiatric patients, in a community mental health center years ago, in a group I ran on change. I basically asked members in this group “why aren’t you changing,” and their answers were close to uniform: “Well, I just don’t want people to get excited about my change,” or “I don’t want to get my hopes up again.” Rarely did they say, “because of my symptoms.” That means we have an enormous “chief complaint” problem in this country, in which clients of the mental health system see existential struggles over disappointment as their problem in change, while clinicians are

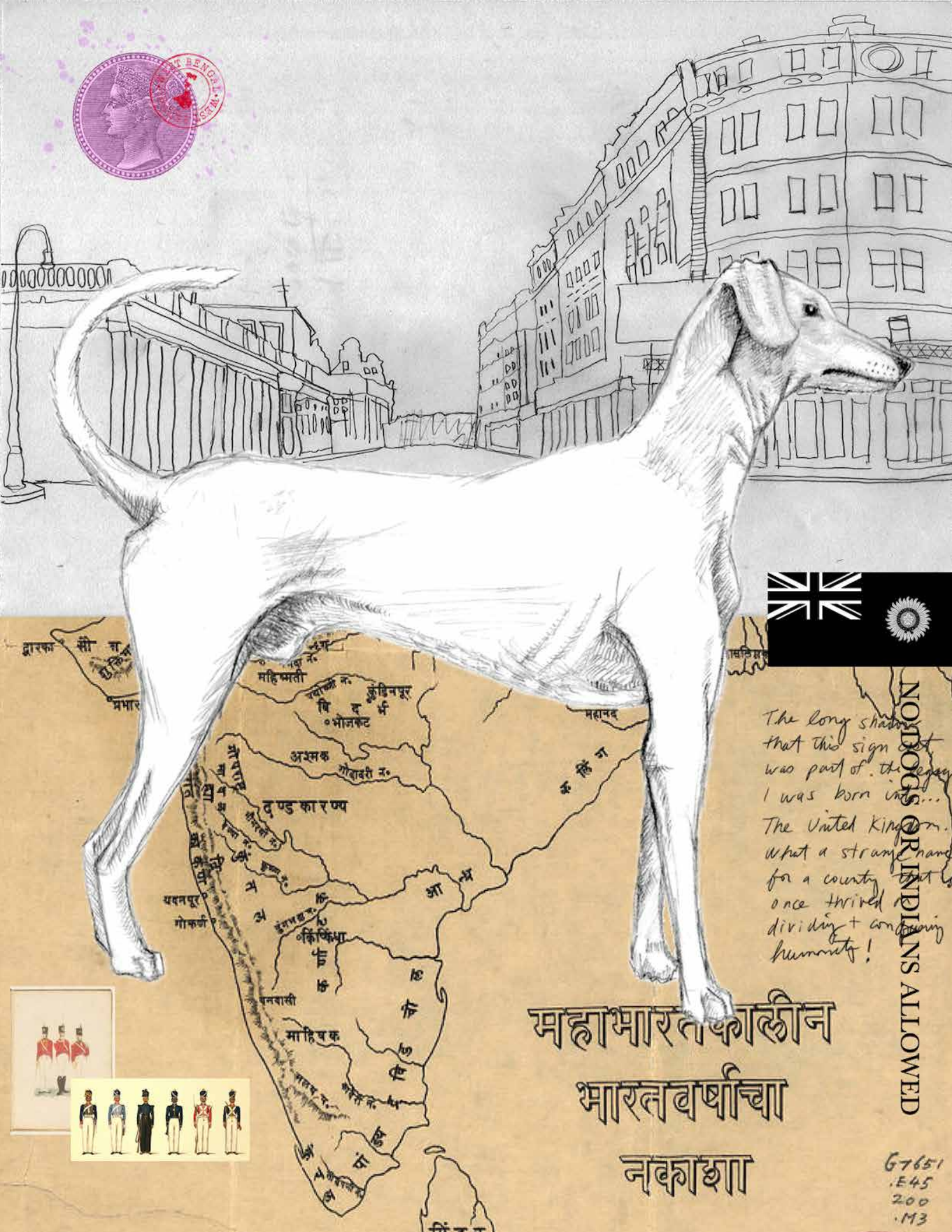
describing their complaints as skull-bound. How does one move past this kind of crisis in self-belief? Well one way you don’t do that is by entering a world of pure treatment, your days marked hour-by-hour with the pressure to “get better.” The best way to get there is to vigorously treat people for all the psychiatric events and problematic habits while they live on their own, and pursue a purpose, while making their own sandwiches for lunch, getting some form of a job or going to school or volunteering. That often, truly, takes a hospital without walls, since we need to combine all the social recovery stuff with good psychiatric and addiction treatment. However, we live in the US, with a twisted view of “readiness,” in which we say a person is ready to return to the world when they are “well,” when in fact our wellness is dependent on the medicine of psychosocial resources. We’re saying, in a sense, you can have the most important medicine for your recovery when you recover.

AR: Tell me a little more about how all this is put into action.

RE: Well, like I said, about 70 percent of the work is conducted outside the office. But, unlike other programs that might provide “companions” or “coaches” for people, we have trained clinicians, mostly master’s level, who help our clients become what we call “more socially articulated.” And they do this through small steps of social inclusion, from taking a yoga class with them, to visiting during lunch breaks at work, to attending classes with them, as only a few examples. That’s what the staff are doing all day: they’re doing stuff with clients, but with a clinician’s ear for issues of motivation. This takes a giant ship and points to another crazy way we approach behavioral issues in the country: we put the most intensive resources into sequestering people—and I would say also into the surveillance of them—and put little clinical resources to the challenges they face in their daily lives. Dealing with somebody who is symptomatic while you’re helping them in their daily life takes really good and very intensive psychiatry. Again, it’s all about shifting what we mean by “readiness.” Let’s not say, “When Fred is no longer psychotic we’ll finally get him a job.” Let’s say instead, “Let’s give him a team, one that meets for rounds each morning that includes Fred’s psychiatrist, and let’s visit him during his lunch breaks, drive him home from work, give him a place to disclose about his fears of hope and his struggles at work, and assist him in being ‘ready’ right now.” Otherwise, we’re in that bizzarro world of “no medicine until you’re well.” The medicine is social inclusion; the medicine is pride. ■

This interview has been edited and condensed. The audio of the interview is available with this story on our website.

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WORK

IN THE GRAY ZONE

Working through othering at APsA

BY HIMANSHU AGRAWAL

Illustration by Austin Hughes

EVERYWHERE IN pre-1947 India, signs hung that read, “No Indians or Dogs allowed.”

Even though the caste system predates the British Raj, the long shadow that this sign cast was part of the legacy I was born into. Our English “masters” used to call us “darkies,” and over hundreds of years of internalized trauma, we Indians started identifying with our aggressors. “You better make a lot of money when you grow up,” I remember being told by well-intentioned relatives. “No beautiful girl will marry you for your looks.” By “my looks,” of course they meant my dark complexion. By “beautiful girl,” they meant fair-skinned. Needless to say, this domination by a minority of fair-skinned Indians seemed far from fair to the rest of us.

The United Kingdom. What a strange name for a country that once thrived on dividing and conquering humanity! Between the ages of six and nine, I lived there, in London, where several lovely things happened to me. I developed a British accent, which gave me some protection against my darkieness when I returned to India. I was introduced to this man called Jesus, who was a very nice person and did really cool stuff for people who were not empowered enough to do so for themselves. He felt mine, not an “other.” I also really liked my headmaster. He wore a black suit with a slick, stylish, horizontal white collar. Back then, I had no idea what the words “Catholic Priest” meant. They were all mine, and I was theirs: Mrs. Whitaker, who let me orate my silly stories to the entire classroom; Ike from Pakistan, whom I beat in a spelling test once; the cafeteria lady who smuggled me extra Scotch eggs; and Zoe with the short blonde hair—we used to rub against light poles side by side, having discovered the greatest pleasure of latency which she called “the feelies.”

Life was simpler before I was an “otherer.” I did not feel shame or hate or fear when random Londoners would yell in our faces, “Go back home, Paki!” All I remember feeling was genuine confusion: “How can a White man, the smartest being on earth, not know the difference between India and Pakistan? And why did this man not like my friend Ike?”

I HAVE A COMPLEX relationship with the United States of America. After forty-five years of enduring colorist attacks in India (and the interim experiencing racist attacks in the United Kingdom), and after working tirelessly for fourteen years to earn citizenship in this land of opportunity, I am still made to feel at times that I am far from home. You see, like most English-speaking people in the world, I speak and write in what is called “the Queen’s English,” which differs significantly from American English in its spelling, grammar, and syntax. When I submit a manuscript to an American journal, reviewers regularly comment on how I am “clearly not a native English speaker.” Of course, by English they mean American English. During psychoanalytic training, I have received similar feedback about my writing. One time, my classmate gently snatched my write-up from me and started correcting the page with their pen. It felt humiliating, and my response was simply to comply: “Thank you, ma’am. May I have some more?”

Over the last year, I have had the pleasure of editing my first book, a collection of thirty-eight contributions, from psychoanalytic candidates from twenty-nine countries, covering all six inhabitable continents. It confirmed for me that most of us from across the world follow English syntax and grammar the way I was taught. As chance would have it, the first letter I received was from a candidate from USA. My first revision for that

letter consisted of 128 edits—128 ways in which their American English was faulty. My friend Charles Baekeland, who was coeditor at that time, helped me realize that through my heavy-handed critique I was enjoying the same sadistic pleasure that I accused journal reviewers of imbibing in. In other words, now that I was on the other side, I was identifying with the aggressor. Enraged with my experiences of being othered, I was making the same mistake I accused the US journals of making. To boot, I was entirely missing the forest for the trees—it was a delightful, useful essay and introduced an innovative concept. With these insights, I returned to the task of editing. The second, and final version, offered four edits.

At the 2022 Oscars, Will Smith felt the need to defend his wife’s honor, walked up to host Chris Rock, and slapped him. I remember my initial reaction when I witnessed it live on television: *yeah, seems about right*. It was only after taking in the ensuing uproar on the APsA listserv that I examined my initial reaction, which now seemed callous, primitive, barbaric even. Memories emerged from repressed eras, innumerable moments from New Delhi, where every morning commoners leave their home dressed in full invisible battle gear and enter the battleground called New Delhi traffic. There is a joke where I come from: if you get into a fender bender, how do you tell which driver was in the right? Answer: the driver who threw the first slap. Funny? It sure was growing up, but it no longer is. This is because now I have privilege. I am in a White world, married to a White wife, living with White in-laws, presenting at one of the Whitest conferences in the world. By White, of course, I do not mean the color of one’s skin. Unless you have a rare dermatological condition, there is no such thing as white skin. Most of us here are pink. The rest of us are different shades of brown. For my purposes here, please know that when I say White, what I really mean is privilege. Power. I have come to believe that White is synonymous with powerFULLness, and Black is synonymous with powerLESSness. I have also come to realize that very few of us actually have the capacity to live in what I would call “the gray zone.” As individuals in pursuit of the ever-evolving idea we call “a psychoanalytic identity,” I believe each one of us here has potential to find—and live in—this gray zone. Compared to others, we are more likely to inspire, and expire, in the gray.

THE NEXT PART of this essay, when I was first preparing it as a presentation for an APsA conference, was supposed to be this: “I am speaking now directly to the candidates and the early graduates here. Our seniors have failed

us in showing what it is like to think in the gray. Let us aspire to do better than them.” However, the same night that I wrote that part, I had a dream. I was presenting my final write-up to three Caucasian women analysts who comprised the progression committee at my dreamt-up institute. The women listened, then they passed their verdict: one pass and two fails. One of the women enumerated all the flaws in my write-up and presentation, including “medical stiffness.” At that point in the dream, I started yelling back at them, counter-accusing them of being discriminatory towards physicians who wished to be psychoanalysts, of being rigid in their ways, of being out of touch with contemporary realities, and so forth. Their expressions went from disappointment to horror. I stormed out of the room, and on the way out I saw the same look of shock on the face of a fellow candidate who had, for some reason, been sitting in the same room the entire time. Only after I noticed his genuine horror at how I had behaved did something click inside me. I turned back, and with sunken shoulders I apologized to the three women. I shared my insights with them as they were emerging. I told them that over the years I had gotten cocksure and had learned to try and get by with charm instead of hard work. I was realizing what a poor job I had done with my write-up—scribbled, disorganized, incomplete. I told them I could also now see that I had been unable to answer any of their questions about my case and had generally made a fool of myself during the entire presentation. And despite all this, I had actually expected them to approve me. When they didn’t, and when they called me out on my sense of entitlement, it was too severe a narcissistic injury for me to bear, and I realized that what I initially thought was an act of righteous outrage was in fact a regressed tantrum. I told them they deserved to be treated better and left the room vowing I would do better next time. “Listen more, attack less,” as Dr. Beverly Stoute lovingly chided me recently.

Waking up the next morning and looking again at what I had written about our seniors failing us, I realized that had I actually included those remarks in my presentation, I would have used my privilege to enact an othering. I would be acting out my ageism, “the final frontier in discrimination,” as my friend Dr. Chad Allen once said. He was othered, and he left our institute. I miss him.

But I *do* have a soapbox speech today, and here it is.

I speak now directly to the folks who feel that they are tired of hearing about racism and othering, that there are many other interesting topics to talk about on the APsA listserv, during didactics, and on conference panels. I couldn’t agree with you more. In fact, *I* am tired of hearing about racism and othering.

“Over the last 121 years, APsA has worked through all sorts of othering ... Can we think of one instance when the working through has not been messy?”

It is exhausting. Indeed, there are so many topics that could be presented on that would be far more interesting. So what? What would you have APsA do? Play a fiddle while it is on fire? Make no mistake: APsA is on fire! It has been on fire before, and it has taken drastic measures, including the threat of lawsuits, to quench that fire. It is on fire again. Here is what I recently read on my neighborhood listserv: “Goddammit! I got woken up at 2 a.m. by the obnoxious sound of a medical helicopter evacuating someone, and I haven’t been able to sleep since then.” He added, “And you know what’s even worse? Being evacuated in that helicopter.” I am not sure if that man was a psychoanalyst. However, in that moment, he was showing far better self-analytic functioning than many of us have displayed on the member listserv.

The roof is shaking. Casualties are falling, some are being airlifted, some are staying, others are complaining. We are allowed to complain, of course, to feel. However, we are the American *Psychoanalytic* Association. Instead of repeating, let us remember to be curious while we complain. To try and practice radical openness, as Dr. Anton Hart calls it. My teacher Dr. Deborah Boughton once described an enactment that had derailed her during a previous lecture by saying, “I can’t always control what I say or do. But I always have some control over what I do next.” Let’s humble ourselves and take lessons from the best of us who surround us.

When Bertha Pappenheim told Sigmund Freud to shut up because he was interfering with her free associations, did he start a long listserv post, a diatribe saying, “You are wrong and let me tell you why”? Did he declare her to be conflict averse? Or accuse her of being the “tone police”? No. He said, “Hmmm ... I think you might be right. Please go on.” Okay, maybe not the “please” part, but he humbled himself and listened. Surely, we do not have egos larger than Father Freud! If he can do it, so can we! And if we still can’t do it, let’s stop cherry-picking Dr. Freud’s recommendations to psychoanalysts; let’s heed his recommendation and return for another bout of psychoanalysis.

Othering and minoritization are the new glass ceilings we have reached, together, at APsA. Over the last 121 years, APsA has worked through all sorts of othering: Jews vs. non-Jews; Americans vs. Europeans; physicians vs. nonphysicians; women vs. men; binary vs. nonbinary; Anna vs. Melanie; cis vs. trans; Sigmund Freud vs. (insert dozens of names here); candidates vs. graduates; associate members vs. lifetime members; Kramer vs. Kramer; classical vs. ego psychology vs. object relations vs. self-psychology vs. relationists vs. Lacanians vs. Jungians vs. CBT vs. DBT—the list goes on and on. Can we think of one instance when the working through has *not* been messy?

Now, recently, we have given this phenomenon a name, “othering,” and have started talking about othering vs. not othering. By doing so, it feels like we have moved up from discussing content to discussing process. It feels like an evolution of sorts. Evolution can be messy. As an organization, as a family of sorts, perhaps survival will require inspiring, and expiring, in the gray.

I have had no dreams about this soap box speech so far. Maybe I will have one tonight. Or perhaps *you* will. We will both have to see. In the meanwhile, perhaps you will consider my invitation and join me, as I take some deep breaths in the gray. ■

This essay was adapted from a presentation at the June 2023 virtual APsA conference.

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Where Are the Social Workers in APsA?

BY FLORA LAZAR

Illustrations by Jason Novak

Making good on a more inclusive vision of psychoanalysis

IN THE LAST five years, the American Psychoanalytic Association (APsA) leadership has taken dramatic steps to halt a long and steady decline in membership. At the beginning of 2023, a supermajority voted to loosen membership requirements while pushing for more inclusivity, for example, by opening up APsA committees to self-nomination. A serious obstacle to the organization's growth, however, remains the number and status of social workers in the organization.

The number of social workers in APsA remains astonishingly small at 8 percent, when social workers comprise more than half

Society, and some formed their own association, the American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work, with its own conference and journal. Even though some participate in APsA's activities and publish in its journal, relatively few social workers have made the migration to APsA or its institutes now that they are officially welcome there. No masters-level social worker has ever held the presidency of APsA.

Given the sharp decline in the number of physicians who go into psychiatry—a 36 percent decline since 2011—and APsA's hunger to grow, the organization might want to tap

I wish to protect analysis from the doctors and ... from the priests. I should like to hand it over to a profession which does not yet exist, a profession of lay curers of souls.

—Sigmund Freud, letter to Oskar Pfister, November 25, 1928

of mental health providers nationwide, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Physicians still account for a majority of the membership at 62 percent as of 2019, the latest year for which figures are available.

Not all nonmedical clinicians have fared as poorly as social workers. The percentage of clinical psychologists, for example, has more than quadrupled since the late 1980s, when a lawsuit aimed at opening the APsA-certified institutes to clinicians outside the medical profession. Psychologists now account for over a quarter of members, which is triple the number of social workers. The number of social workers at most institutes remains minuscule compared to the number of psychologists and MDs.

Marginalized by APsA, many social workers have opted for non-APsA institutes, such as the Contemporary Freudian

social workers to bolster its ranks. The failure to attract a greater number of social workers up to now represents a significant missed opportunity for APsA and its network of institutes, as well as for the social workers whose practice could be enriched and supported by a greater connection to psychoanalytic ideas and institutions.

A BIT OF HISTORY It wasn't always this way. Social work actually represented one of the driving forces behind the growth of prewar psychoanalysis. A full two decades before the opening of the first training institutes in the US and the agreement that they would be limited to medical doctors, social workers were actively exploring the application of psychoanalytic ideas in work with juvenile offenders and "delinquent girls." While American psychiatrists were routinely traveling to Europe

to learn how to apply the ideas of Freud and his followers to clinical work, as early as 1909 leading social workers were incorporating psychoanalytic ideas into their work and recruiting medical professionals, as needed, to advance their social welfare mission.

Psychoanalysis was also central to social science academics. Indeed, the very social scientists then considered the apostles of the new empiricism often embraced psychoanalysis, though that embrace is often forgotten or minimized. Prominent among them were sociologists like Ernest W. Burgess, an ardent exponent of the case history method of sociological research, and his colleague William Fielding Ogburn, who chaired the American Sociological Society and the University of Chicago's sociology department before chairing the board of the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis.

The most promising effort to integrate psychoanalysis with behavioral science, social work, and social science played out first and most prominently in Chicago, which was both the seat of Progressive Era reform and home to the University of Chicago, the leading social science research university of the time. People sometimes talk about psychoanalysis as though it's incompatible with progressive reform because the latter focuses on structural social problems while the former focuses on individuals' internal psychological conflicts. Some of the most pivotal social reforms and scientific advances of the Progressive Era, however, have a clear debt to psychoanalysis.

No institution did more to spread the ideas of psychoanalysis in social work than Chicago's Juvenile Court. Social workers eager to remake the system of juvenile justice devoured the works of Freud's criminological interpreters such as Austrian analyst and educator August Aichhorn and Berlin analyst Franz Alexander, who would eventually lead the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute. Indeed, historian Nathan Hale called the Juvenile Court's Psychopathic Institute a leading center for the early recruitment of psychoanalysts in the US.

Influential Chicago social worker and philanthropist Ethel Sturges Dummer exemplified this integration of social work and psychoanalysis as a veteran of the both the YWCA movement and the Juvenile Court movement. From the earliest reports of Freud's visit to Clark University, Dummer took an expansive view of the relevance of psychoanalysis to social work, underscoring the value of Freud's theories for understanding and helping rehabilitate young women who engaged in prostitution—an issue that preoccupied the social work

profession and social reformers in the post–World War I period. In her 1923 foreword to *The Unadjusted Girl*, the first major academic study of prostitution, Dummer displayed a nuanced understanding of Freud, arguing that “Freud’s teaching of the danger of sex repression to mental health ... would seem to explain much of the modern success in the rehabilitation of the young prostitute.” By the time the first psychoanalytic institutes in the United States opened in the early 1930s, alumnae of the Chicago efforts had spread to Philadelphia, New York, and New Haven, producing a flowering of interest in

the application of psychoanalysis to social work.

Tensions existed between organizations focused on locating mental illness in individual sources and those sociologists and social workers like Dummer who focused on societal explanations. Nevertheless, the potential for collaboration was evident in the May 1930 National Conference on Mental Hygiene, a Rockefeller-backed effort that drew a who's who of social workers, scholars, philanthropists, and analysts. By many estimates, Franz Alexander was the toast of the group's DC event, from which he returned to find an invitation to join the faculty of the University of Chicago—where he would become the world's first university-based professor of psychoanalysis.

WHERE WE ARE NOW The collaboration between psychoanalysis and sociology would last only so long, however. A century later, the strong ties that leading academics and social

workers had forged were all but gone. Indeed, psychoanalysis has disappeared from the curriculum of many of the leading schools of social work in the United States, which prompted social work professor Jerrold Brandell to ask about the fate of psychoanalysis in social work academe, “Can this patient be saved?” Outside of schools explicitly focused on psychoanalytic social work, such as Smith College, graduate training in social work generally offers only a cursory exposure to psychoanalytic ideas. Some schools, such as the Jane Addams School of Social Work at the University of Illinois, explicitly exclude psychoanalysis as not “evidence-based.” Others relegate the courses to non-tenure-track faculty. For example, the two-course sequence on psychoanalytic therapy at the University of Chicago's social work school is currently taught by an adjunct faculty member. Continuing education programs rarely include developments in psychoanalytic thought and focus instead on interventions like dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) and motivational interviewing that have been successfully marketed as evidence-based.

As social work training has wandered away from psychoanalysis, APsA has done nothing to stem the tide, leaving a dearth of social workers in APsA membership and leadership and at APsA institutes. Outright exclusion, degree privilege, and differential pay scales contribute. Some leading training programs on the East Coast, such as Columbia's and NYU's postgraduate program, still do not even accept social work applicants for candidacy. Can the lack of a clinical doctorate continue to provide a compelling rationale for exclusion from university-based institutes?

Likely, the low levels of social work participation in APsA and leadership in its institutes also derive from economic barriers. The cost of training and foregone earnings associated with training fall disproportionately on social workers, whose pay is generally far lower than psychologists' or psychiatrists'. To attract more social workers into APsA, it may not be enough simply to open the doors to non-MDs as APsA did, because

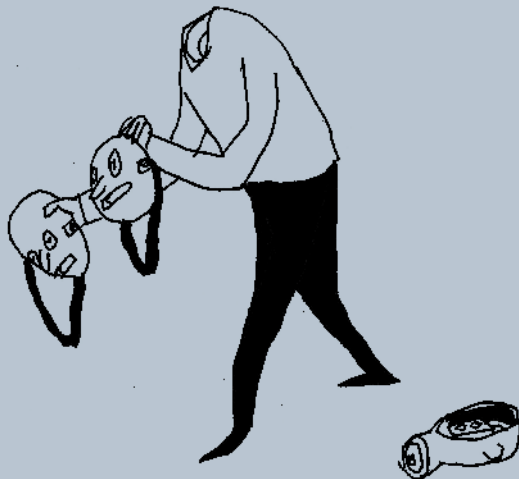
degree privilege has erected and maintained structural barriers to the inclusion of social workers in all areas of the community, as the findings of the recently published report of the Holmes Commission on Racial Equality suggest.

In a period of diminished interest in psychoanalysis among clinical mental health service providers, the marginalization of the single largest profession providing clinical services has left a significant resource untapped by APsA. If APsA intends to make good on its claims about inclusion, it will need to undertake a top-to-bottom review of the pipeline from candidacy to APsA participation with an eye to closing the gap between the potential and the actual engagement of social workers.

The most profound obstacle to attracting social workers to psychoanalysis may be the field's resistance to fully theorizing individual experience in the social environment—long considered social work's distinctive contribution. This resistance stifles serious exploration of the social surround—through more robust psychoanalytic study of topics such as race, class, and gender—across all aspects of institutional and intellectual life in psychoanalysis. Absent such an exploration, the long shadow of the Ferenczi controversy—the failure of psychoanalysis to account adequately for the real-life traumas experienced by

patients—will continue to leave psychoanalysis and many of its institutes open to the criticisms that it is a treatment of and for the elite.

There seems to be some dawning recognition of the underrepresentation of social work in APsA and related institute leadership. APsA's affiliated institutes in particular have taken small steps to address the limited place of social workers in the community and the exclusion of the social surround in the psychoanalytic understanding of behavior. Programs and tracks in community psychoanalysis have surfaced in several institutes. Among the oldest American institutes, which opened in the 1930s, Boston and Chicago appear to have made the





most progress in the inclusion of social workers in leadership. Until recently, the Chicago Institute was led by social worker Erika Schmidt, and several social workers currently occupy leadership positions on the Boston Institute's board of directors, including the board chair. The Washington Baltimore Center, another member of the old guard, has a sprinkling of social workers in its executive leadership and on key committees. It even has a disproportionate number, roughly 50 percent, on its Admissions and Ethics Committees. Nevertheless, even there, social workers remain largely absent from committees related to the traditional concerns of psychoanalysis—supervision, training, faculty development, and curriculum.

Within APsA as a whole, the perceived need to address the marginalization of social workers has been faint but real. The organization has revived its Graduate Education in Social Work Committee, which promotes psychoanalytic education among social work students and licensed social workers in the community. This year, the committee announced its first-ever tuition support program for social workers interested in advanced training in psychoanalysis. It plans to award \$750 to defray the cost of tuition for two early-career social workers enrolled in programs offered by APsA-approved institutes or APsA affiliate societies.

But social workers still remain largely invisible in APsA. So it is no surprise that their signature emphasis on the importance of the social surround in individual experience has been muted in recent decades. Although the Holmes Commission challenged the field to rethink the importance of the social surround in theorizing about individual emotional life and behavior, the Commission itself included only one social worker. APsA's June 2023 conference program, designed in part to stimulate conversation related to "the social," included only one social worker in a program of some two dozen participants. Social work is the only clinical profession explicitly required by its code of ethics and its education to address the social dimension of emotional life. To rebuild the alliance between social work and psychoanalysis, more progress is needed. ■

Flora E. Lazar is a historian and psychotherapist who has spent her career at the intersection of research, public policy, and clinical practice. She has served on several APsA task forces related to psychoanalytic advocacy. She lives in Salisbury, Connecticut.

“Within APsA as a whole, the perceived need to address the marginalization of social workers has been faint but real.”

Distributed Leadership

Illustration by Austin Hughes



DUE TO A historic bylaw change in 2023 to promote greater inclusivity, psychoanalytic psychotherapists—therapists with psychoanalytic methods who haven't completed traditional institute training—now have full membership status in the American Psychoanalytic Association. They've brought with them some fresh approaches to committee life.

Margo Goldman explains in the *Psychotherapist Newsletter* that the newly formed Psychotherapist Committee is piloting a new management approach meant to renew and bolster the activities of what had been called the Psychotherapist Associates Committee before the bylaw amendment. Under this approach, the committee has opted to distribute the responsibilities of the committee chair among *all* members. The idea derived from what has variously been called “participatory management,” “distributed leadership,” “shared leadership,” or “servant leadership.”

These managerial concepts owe something to psychoanalytic thinkers like Manfred Kets de Vries, an economist, psychoanalyst, and leading author in the field of organizational psychology, and Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*. Distributed leadership has been gaining traction for decades now as a strategy to protect organizations from the resentment, stagnation, and disengagement that hierarchies sometimes engender and to help organizations adapt, evolve, and grow. Kets de Vries writes,

Distributed leadership is a strange beast: it's made possible by a sense of community, but it also encourages a sense of community. In organizations where everyone takes a part in leadership, authentic leaders take vicarious pleasure in coaching their younger executives and watching their accomplishments.

Goldman says she loves chamber music,

in which each musician has a unique voice that contributes to a sum greater and more beautiful than its parts—*without* having a formal conductor. I have been struck by the parallel between a chamber ensemble and our committee's newly evolved work strategy.

Having worked with this shared leadership model since February 2023, Goldman reports that the committee has seen significant benefits, from avoidance of the stress and burnout sometimes experienced by committee chairs to enhanced innovation and collaboration among committee members. Energized members have in turn broadened their impact in the Association by joining other committees, collegiality groups, and task forces.—ed.

FURTHER READING:

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