

Framing the Question: Psychoanalytic Process and Home Offices – An Alternate Approach.

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This essay is a response to articles by Karen Maroda and Robert Langs concluding that home offices were an example of a self-serving and possibly unethical frame violation on the part of the therapist. The author argues that such an approach misconceives the essence of psychoanalysis. For therapeutic purposes, the model of the unconscious is understood as limited to what is repressed and the therapist's conscious commitment to the talking cure, without flight to any secret or arcane knowledge, is offered as the essence of psychoanalysis.

Key words: unconscious mind, frame violations, anonymity, confidentiality, profession ethics, professional superego, home office, transference, therapeutic process.

In volume 24 of *Psychoanalytic Psychology* both Karen Maroda (2007) and Robert Langs (2007) offer conjectures and conclusions about home offices – their reality and their dangers. They both argue for the hope that future analysts will no longer consider a home office as either viable or professionally ethical. Robert Langs writes of the inherent “frame violation” that home offices embody. In the process he contrasts the defensive and

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denial prone conscious mind with the knowing, wise and non-defensive unconscious mind. (As I read him, Langs speaks of an unconscious system and an unconscious mind interchangeably). His basic thesis is that the unconscious mind knows and the conscious mind accommodates, defends, distorts and is a cause for suspicion for any analyst who understands how to decode the ever-present deception that frame violations embody. Anyone familiar with the prolific writings of Langs knows, of course, that this is a cursory summary of his ideas. Langs has developed a radically different approach to psychoanalytic technique based on his understanding of frame violations and his reading of what the unconscious mind knows. He entitles his comments “One Mind or Two?” His exposition, in terms of the wisdom of the unconscious mind, supports, I believe, my understanding of how he is using the terms “one mind or two,” an understanding that I believe is misleading in its consequences for the practice of psychoanalysis.

Karen Maroda’s thesis about home offices is certainly worth analytic reflection. As a proscription, however, highlighting the inherent and seemingly automatic dangers of home offices, it is also not only misleading but dangerous in its assumption about the frame violation that home offices might exemplify. I hope such a cursory summary, conveys the essence of

both Maroda's and Langs' position without undo distortion. I would like to offer some alternate considerations and conclusions in response to their main theses.

Conscious and Unconscious

It is unproductive and misleading, although very common, to speak about an unconscious mind and a conscious mind. The terms "conscious" and "unconscious" are, at best, adjectival designations. Freud (1923/1961), in *The Ego and the Id* limited the term "unconscious" to what was *repressed*. Period. In a recent article in this journal (Gargiulo, 2006) I have summarized some critiques of the two-mind language. In an attempt to understand the complexity of what we refer to as mind, however, one can speak of a source of conscious action as well as purposeful desire as having roots in what is not immediately observable, that is, what is a consequence of either repression or what is non-conscious, e.g., the drives. That there are other non-conscious sources which contribute to conscious experiences is also true, somewhat akin to the automatic nervous system which regulates bodily and brain functions. Such factors are not what psychoanalysis intends when it speaks of an unconscious.

Such models as conscious and the repressed unconscious do not seem to fully explain many aspects of the human condition and human motivation.

Following in Plato's footsteps, Jung spoke of archetypes – normative and formative universal patterns. Freud spoke, initially, of the generic unconscious. More recently Grotstein (2000) speaks about “the ineffable subject of the unconscious” (p. 127ff) and Langs (p. 186) speaks of entry into the world of *divine wisdom* – understood as secular, not normatively sacred. I (Gargiulo, 2004) have attempted to address the same area of experience by introducing the term “an everyday transcendence;” an everyday transcendence that attempts to situate human beings within a wider context than personal individuality suggests. Separation/individuation is an operative concept, not an ontological one. Human beings exist within the context of their culture, the Earth and the Cosmos. By use of the term “an everyday transcendence,” I hope to address what it means for a human being to exist beyond the confines of a private self.

Consequently, speaking of an unconscious which “knows,” or which is the locus of *divine wisdom* – in all its manifestations – is not productive as applicable to private-self-individuals. I have summarized my thoughts (Gargiulo, 2006, p. 471) as follows:

...such an unconscious is more akin to what I have spoken of as the unconscious of the world – the vital area of infinite possibilities. [The area of infinite possibilities is a postulate of quantum mechanics, discussed in the article alluded to.] One can speak, as Grotstein does, [for example] as long as one understands that *the ineffable subject of the unconscious* is not a personalized object, that is, not a subject in any recognizable mode.

[Similarly there is no separate “unconscious mind” – on an individual level, separate from repression; there is a divine wisdom – if one wishes to use such terms – that can be manifested by, but not localized in, an individual. Divine wisdom is, at best, a dimension of what one alludes to as the life force.] [Consequently] speaking of an ineffable subject of the unconscious has meaning...only if such a subject is spoken of as a mirror image, so to speak, of the I understood as an imaginative / cultural construct.¹ It has no reality in itself. Otherwise, we would be discussing theological interpretations not psychoanalytic insights, nor for that matter, quantum mechanics analogues. [The same is true for an unconscious mind as locus of divine wisdom and, perhaps more importantly, as a “subject” who correctly perceives therapeutic boundary violations.]

I do not believe that psychoanalysts should, in any way, indulge in secret knowledge (gnosis). Therefore, contra Langs, I am unwilling to simply assume that consciousness is automatically suspect and that one cannot rely on it to understand and perceive unproductive and/or damaging interventions within the therapeutic situation. The most essential “frame” of therapy is the relationship between a therapist and a patient. This is not a new position as anyone who knows the work of Sandor Ferenczi and many of the English analysts can attest. I believe it was Bion who spoke of analysis as one pained human being listening to another pained human being. Psychoanalysis is a human and humanistic science. It should be practiced carefully and with integrity and with professional parameters. It is not comparable, however, to a delicate process where one slip of the proverbial knife spells trouble. Such

¹ Echoing Buddhist and Taoist thought I have suggested that a more productive model of the I is had when we speak of the I as an imaginative/cultural construct (Gargiulo, 2004/2006). The “I” refers to an operative experience rather than a substantial one. That is, we are taught to identify ourselves as an “I.”

an approach, I believe, encourages too much self-awareness on the part of the therapist; a self-awareness that obstructs the necessary self-forgetfulness that psychoanalytic therapy entails. The school of thought, following Edward Glover, which emphasizes the dangers of an incorrect interpretation, or, in view of Langs' convictions, the ever-present postulate of a frame violation does violence, I believe, to the necessary empathy and the relaxed interchange out of which spontaneous as well as surprising therapeutic interventions arise.

The Role of Boundaries

Under most conditions, certain operative boundaries between analyst and patient do obtain. The analyst usually has a set fee, a specific time, a private setting in which to conduct therapy. The analyst does not *ordinarily* communicate to a patient his or her personal and/or intimate phantasies, does not confuse professional friendship with personal friendship, does not expect a patient to be socially polite and evidences a genuine willingness to discuss absolutely everything that transpires within the context of therapy and the inter-personal relationship. An analyst also communicates that he or she is willing to learn from a patient and should, ideally, have no interest in being the "knowing other" – that is, the one who possesses arcane knowledge. The human dialogue between analyst and patient presumes and builds upon a

therapist's knowledge and competence; analytic knowledge and insights, however, should always be negotiated, never imposed upon a patient. Interpretations are invitations to consider an alternate view; resistance analysis is only effective within an atmosphere of care and concern.

An analyst should provide a quiet, safe and, when possible, consistent setting for the analytic experience. Intrusions into this setting whether it be an analyst's barking dog, or his or her children within sight, whether it is a mail delivery or the banging of a steam pipe in a professional office building; all such apparent interruptions are, whenever necessary, brought into the therapeutic discussion. If, for example, an analyst consciously or forgetfully spends excessive time talking about him- or herself, without a willingness to reflect on such behavior, he or she evidences a serious lack of professional competence. Such considerations are normative independent of an office being located in one's home area or a more public building. If the more public mission of psychoanalysis is to help the general public understand the universality of emotional conflict, of sexual desire, of the need to talk about one's past and one's present, then how is the fact that a person might be seen entering an analyst's office a violation of confidentiality or anonymity? To believe so appears to me to be colluding with a patient's defenses. We are taught to guarantee a patient's anonymity

and confidentiality in our publications and our discussions. Anonymity does not entail our securing, for patients, public invisibility.

The analyst's competence and professional commitment are an ever-renewed experience. There is no need for an individualized unconscious mind, as child and possible heir of *divine wisdom*, to be called in to guarantee the accuracy of the analytic process. If an analyst has not created an atmosphere where a patient's most positive and/or negative feelings about an analyst or the therapeutic process can be talked about, then something quite essential is lacking in the process. No siren call to be vigilant about decoding frame violations can correct such a state of affairs.

Transference

It is crucial to recognize that transference, in any of its manifestations, is first and foremost a phenomenon that is created by the patient and not by the analyst. An analyst does not create a setting in order to evoke transference – that makes transference a by-product of an analyst's activity. It is the patient who speaks and reacts to an analyst and to the analytic process out of his/her personal and emotional histories, – a series of histories that make living in the present difficult, painful and/or problematic. Since an analyst does not know what is coming from a patient, he or she must be quietly prepared for everything. It is a patient's need or desire which will use whatever situation

he or she is in as (transferential) hallmarks of his or her unintergrated and/or unresolved conflicts that haunt the present.

Professional Superego

Notwithstanding the reality that psychoanalysts treat human beings and profoundly affect their lives, they must be allowed the freedom of experimentation without an ever-present professional superego judging their personal ethics or professional competence. Each practitioner must continually strive to bring as much integrity, competence and commitment to his or her work as he or she is capable of. But for any human and scientific endeavor to advance, mistakes must be as honored as much as success; experimentation must be encouraged, not as an alternate to responsibility but rather as an example of professional responsibility. “Correct technique,” I believe, is an unrecognized narcissistic phantasy that has been perpetuated for far too long. Interventions have various consequences. Given the extraordinary variables of working with individuals, one has to be both sober and suspect in evaluating consequences.

Context provides the meaning of language and context provides the meaning of therapeutic interventions. Psychoanalysis should be no more committed to supporting Judeo/Christian mores or ethics than in supporting Tantric Buddhist beliefs about the value of communal orgasm in overcoming

the illusion of the “I.” We owe no allegiance to either insurance company directives or any set of cultural/political or religious beliefs. Paradoxically, only by recognizing such cultural variability can one recognize and come to terms with the inevitable cultural constraints that any particular society imposes. We owe allegiance to the truth and truth is not found by assertion – which is how I read many of Dr. Langs’ statements – truth, more often than not, finds us.

In some instances home offices may not be optimal, they may perhaps even be damaging, but that is true in some instances only; no need to call for a total ban. In some instances transgressing an apparent boundary frame can prove to be non-therapeutic. Such awareness, however, is not a new finding...it is a refocused perspective.

Conclusion

I hope that the above reflections can contribute to what I believe were Freud’s most valuable contributions. That is, it is only in a willingness to listen to whatever another person is saying that we can hear what they may not be saying, or what they may have no words for, or too many words for. Designating who we are, and what we do, as *psychoanalysis*, is problematic (Gargiulo, 2007 in press). We do not analyze “minds,” – we dialogue with

pained human beings. That is one reason that Freud both valued and was greatly indebted to Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky. Psychoanalysis can continue to build on such a foundation as long as theories of sexuality, or of interpersonal relationships, of narcissism or of death anxieties, are appreciated as adjectives to the noun of the talking process. There is no need to repeatedly create new psychoanalytic foundations – that is the domain of religious sectarianism. We need a quiet and progressive deepening of knowledge in our field: An experience of knowledge, it bears repeating, which is more comfortable with its errors, misperceptions, and/or unproductive conceptualizations in order to advance - than in announcing, peremptorily, the truth.

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