

## PREFACE

This Special Issue of *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* on “Race, Culture, and Ethnicity in the Consulting Room” has been a joint effort between the two of us from its inception to its completion. The papers that follow not only bring psychoanalytic understanding to an area of psychic and social experience that has too long lain in the shadows, compounding our patients’ suffering, but they also shed light on hidden aspects of the work with every patient. We hope this issue will stimulate readers to participate in one of the more active and enlivening dialogues in contemporary psychoanalysis. Please join us in the exploration.

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## INVISIBLE RACISM

BY HENRY F. SMITH, M.D.

The last issue of *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* featured an essay by Gilbert Cole (2005) entitled “Categories as Symptoms: Conceptions of Love in the Psychoanalytic Relationship.” To illustrate what he means by “categories as symptoms,” and paraphrasing James Baldwin, Cole writes:

I am gay precisely to the extent to which you think you are straight. And I am certain that the converse is also true: you are straight precisely to the extent to which I think I am gay. My thought, that I am gay, and that many of you are straight, may describe certain facts about the ways we identify ourselves to ourselves and others, but to regard this distinction as telling me anything deeply meaningful about any of you is a symptom. And the thought that my being identified as gay tells you anything at all about me is equally a symptom. If there is any hope of resolving this symptom . . . we must start with acknowledging the problem. We must find a way of identifying and taking back the projected psychic contents that keep these categories’ specious effects alive. [p. 986]

Translate *gay* and *straight* into the racial, ethnic and cultural categories Baldwin had in mind, and you have the precise problem we are trying to explore in this Special Issue of the *Quarterly*. It is a problem Cole characterizes as “the endlessly circulating process of repudiation and projection” (p. 979).

In this issue, we bring together fourteen psychoanalytic writers, some primarily clinicians who offer the reader clinical process, others primarily academics with insights directly applicable to the

clinical situation, and some who bridge both worlds. All have been participants in recent years in an ongoing dialogue about race in psychoanalysis. You will hear that dialogue first hand as they speak to one another in their papers.

The issue has been organized with one moment in mind: when race and racism enters the consulting room. I am not thinking here so much of its conscious and obvious appearance, although we consider that event as well, but rather its unconscious and more insidious manifestation. In this regard, I would argue that *it is not so much a matter of when race and racism enter the consulting room, but whether and how we notice it*, for in my experience racial, ethnic, and cultural categorization are always present, even in the most apparently benign of settings—when, for example, there is no apparent racial difference between the two participants in the room (see also Altman in this issue).

While many would see the “endlessly circulating” process that Cole describes as universal, originating in the deepest and most denigrated aspects of ourselves, some papers in this issue take a different position. The divide is not so much over the universality of such categories, but over their origin and nature; whether, that is, they are products of conflict—“symptomatic” or even “specious,” as Cole puts it—or built into our development at so fundamental a level that they must for all practical purposes be inaccessible.

Dalal, for example, speaks of them as “social categories of identity” that are “integral to a deep sense of self,” a self he considers to be at its origin “intrinsically social” (pp. 147-148). In his view, our very attachments to persons are “of necessity” attachments to categories. This would seem a fundamentally different, less dynamic, and nonconflictual formulation of how categories form and where they function in our psychic lives. In Dalal’s view, they are learned, inherited, and embedded in our language, making them, one would think, descriptively unconscious but not dynamically so; in the current fashion, some might call them “procedural.” Dalal goes on to argue persuasively that races, as such, do not exist but are endlessly reified; hence, racism is simply “anything—a thought, feeling, or action—that uses the notion of race

as an . . . organizing principle”; that is, “*racism is the manufacture and use of the notion of race*” (p. 157, italics in original). Rather than racism, he prefers the more active term *racialization*. Thus, however embedded the pertinent categories may be, they are then deployed actively in the “manufacture and use of the notion of race” in order to create difference, annihilate sameness, and maintain “a buffer of hatred, disgust, and contempt” (p. 159).

While she does not disagree that race is a social construct, Layton takes issue with Dalal’s notion of racial categories as something we “inherit by learning our language” (p. 242). She quotes Dalal (2002) as arguing that categories “*slide into the psyche with no resistance . . . .* These hidden evaluations are nothing other than the social unconscious” (p. 243, italics in original). In Layton’s view, “they do not slide into the psyche with no resistance—in fact, the familial and cultural transmission of racial as well as class, sex, and gender valuations is generally deeply conflictual, precisely *because* these categories are the products of splitting human capacities and needs” (p. 243, italics in original).

Of the others who speak specifically about racial categories, each situates him- or herself somewhere along the continuum defined by these two authors. Altman, for example, sees racial categories as both social and personal constructions in the service of a need to construct an ideal self, a process he also translates into the familiar functions of projection and introjection. Hamer is more strictly intrapsychic in his view of racism as a form of categorical thinking in regressed states of transference. Smith and Tang define different categories of social identity, some innate and visible (such as race and gender), some innate and invisible (sexual orientation), and some acquired or achieved (marital status and political affiliation). They then show how each category affects what analysts disclose, wittingly and unwittingly, in the clinical situation. Moss defines not only the social but the historical “reality” of race as a category, and then maps racialized objects according to whether the subject perceives them as “degraded” or “ideal,” on the one hand, and similar or dissimilar to the subject, on the other.



It is important to note that whether these authors regard racial categories as conflictually based or intrinsic—social constructions or intrapsychic ones—each eventually finds them to be *essential* to who we are and how we got that way. This is in contrast to some contemporary gender theorists who, as Gediman (2005) suggests, “tend to reject the notion that there is any such thing as innate gender” (p. 1064), and who sometimes seem to chase a post-modern ideal of gender as an infinitely flexible performance. I realize that I am overlooking many nuances in the discourse over race and gender—and a number of bridges between them—in order to highlight a curious paradox. Despite the fact that race itself is widely considered to be a social construction with little or no biological basis (see Altman, Cheng, Dalal, Layton, and Smith and Tang), racial *categories*, attributed to self and others, are regarded as embedded at so early a point in development as to be for all practical purposes an essential component of the person. Gender, on the other hand, is considered by many to be a social construction with nothing innately derived from, or essential to, the person, despite the fact that there is an unmistakable anatomical and biological body that each person and his or her gender must inhabit. (For a more extensive look at the recent gender debates, see Volume 53, Number 4, of the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* [2005].)

To further tease out the racial perspectives in play here, I would like to return to the debate between Dalal and Layton, where there seem to be two distinct if overlapping threads. To summarize: (1) Dalal argues that categories begin as socially constructed entities that are secondarily embedded in individual identity, and then used by both individuals and whole groups to define and differentiate *them* from *us*. (2) Layton argues that categories originate as “products of splitting” and hence are “deeply conflictual” (p. 243), both in their origins and in their usage, and are subsequently transmitted as such by family and culture.

What is at stake here? Notice that this is a debate primarily about developmental origins, and in that sense it is distinct from arguments about practice. All of these authors make it clear that

whether the categories originate as social or intrapsychic constructions, they are subsequently deployed for both social and psychological purposes. But arguments about genesis inevitably slide into considerations of practice, as the former are used to justify the latter, and so we begin to wonder to what extent these categories are changeable, or, in our parlance, analyzable, and how do we analyze them? In the current battle over constructivism and essentialism, just how essential are they? If essential, how conflictual?

From a practical point of view to the extent that the use of categories may *not* be a part of a conflictual, symptomatic process, we are left with a disturbing notion. As psychoanalysts, we have leverage over symptoms; inherited “attachments to categories” seem to render us powerless. Even if we do not subscribe to the centrality of conflict, can we alter an individual’s use of categories if we cannot get hold of his or her motivation for using them, if they are simply part of a person’s identity—a fundamental attachment to categories themselves—and therefore, one might think, intrapsychically inaccessible?

To be sure, the two points of view are not in practice incompatible if we are speaking of something that may be both intrinsic to earliest development and conflictually manipulated in later periods, as is the case with so much of development, or, for that matter, if we think of conflict as embedded at the beginning, as Layton argues. In either case I would suggest that by the time a person comes to us in analysis, his or her use of racial, ethnic, and cultural categories is so complex a function, so imbricated with personal, unconscious, conflictual motives, that we have no choice but to analyze each component. Nonetheless, however these categories are regarded, it is clear that we are dealing with something so deeply embedded in the way we relate to the world that it would be a fool’s errand to imagine that we might analyze them away. It would be as if we could eliminate *difference* itself—or conflict, for that matter.

As I read these papers, I find that it is the concept of *difference* to which they return again and again—so frequently, in fact,

that I begin to think of difference, like absence, as a primary stimulus to thought and fantasy—in which case one could argue that categorization of difference begins even earlier than language, with the first registrations of difference or otherness.

Thus, Apprey speaks of the “provocation” and “invitation” of difference. Moss maps “racialized others” along several parameters but fundamentally in terms of their perceived difference from ourselves. And Dalal, while lamenting that difference has become yet another “buzzword” (p. 135), sets himself the task of constructing a “general theory of difference—in which the fiction called *race* is but one element” (p. 132, *italics in original*).

From a more specifically cultural perspective, Akhtar elaborates the meaning and negotiation of ethnocultural difference for immigrant analysts and their patients. Young-Bruehl confronts the difference between her own culture and that of her two homeless adolescent male patients, along with their difference one from the other. Gu sets himself the task of comparing differences in the cultural manifestations of the Oedipus complex in China and the West. And Cheng asks, “What does it mean to recognize difference in the first place,” suggesting that “reification and objectification are the dangers of paying too lavish an attention to difference” (p. 98), thereby turning difference itself into a fetish.

Inevitably, from time to time, discussions of difference elicit the very problems they try to elucidate. When an early draft of one paper, for example, opened with the following sentence, “Psychoanalysis has only recently begun to come to terms with difference,” the author clearly meant racial, cultural, and ethnic difference. But consider the sentence itself. *Psychoanalysis has only recently begun to come to terms with difference*. If, to some, the author’s meaning is transparent and shared, to others the statement sounds false. The notion of difference—sexual and anatomic, for example—presided over the very origins of psychoanalysis, its bedrock, Freud said. More recently, from various theoretical perspectives, notably the contemporary Kleinians, the difference embodied in separate persons and separate minds has become a core aspect of psychoanalytic theory and technique.

Thus, a simple declarative sentence on the topic of difference participates in the problem it poses, subtly dividing readers into two groups, those who know its meaning and those who do not, to the exclusion of the latter. With this example, I do not mean to overlook the fact that many analysts have simply not read the literature on multicultural perspectives, but only to suggest that, in ordinary discourse, we seem unable *not* to enact the very problem we are trying to understand.

While enacting the issue we are analyzing may be a factor in every argument, not to mention in every analysis (Smith, in press), it is particularly so when we are talking of the “endlessly circulating process of repudiation and projection” (Cole 2005, p. 979). Because of this endless circulation, you may encounter various points in this Special Issue that will tempt you to participate in the process of repudiation, aiming it at the author. Sometimes the temptation may lie in an author’s use of a particular theory and the customary words of that theory, sometimes in the use of racial epithets so denigrating that it may be uncomfortable to read them—racial assaults whose very presence on the page feels no less assaultive for being directly quoted from patients or from literature. You may wonder, what is the author’s personal stake in using them? Altman turns the mirror on himself to explore the possibility that even his dispassionate use of such terms reveals his own racism. I would add that racism, like the symptomatic use of any category, is just as prominent in its defensive avoidance as in its more vocal manifestations.

And what of those colleagues who ask, as one recently did of me, “What’s the point of this? There is nothing about racism that is any different from any other form of sadism. When you come under attack in the transference, you interpret it.” It is a useful point of reference. Need we concern ourselves with specific differences and the particular manifest sadism each spawns, or only with general principles of technique? Surely, with every patient, we work with the manifest specificity of his or her intrapsychic life, but in order to analyze what is manifest or infer what is unconscious, we have to *recognize* it, and while some manifesta-

tions of racism are unmistakable, the more insidious are invisible to us—or, more accurately, we keep them invisible for our own dynamic reasons. And then, in not seeing what is there, we perpetuate the trauma of racism that Holmes so eloquently describes in this issue.

Ralph Ellison's (1952) seminal novel begins:

I am an invisible man . . . . I am invisible simply because people refuse to see me . . . . That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eye of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their *inner* eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality. [p. 3]

This is the analyst's challenge. Can we work with these issues without compounding them by our own "disposition of the eyes," thus rendering them and our patients once again invisible?

My interest lies in the way in which racial, cultural, and ethnic difference and categorization are present in every moment of every analysis, and never more insidiously so than in those analyses in which there is no apparent racial or ethnic difference between analyst and patient. As many of the authors point out, "no difference" is of course an impossibility. No difference denies specificity, denies individuality, and is itself an assault—difference that masquerades as sameness. I am interested in the apparent invisibility of such difference, and what the effect of that invisibility may be; if it is invisible, how it may be detected, especially in the transference; and what are the traumatic consequences if we fail to do so.

I am reminded of a patient I once saw, a man in his early forties, who was born in Germany and worked with a consulting firm in the United States. He is tall, blond, soft-spoken, and speaks fluent English with a German accent. Because the images from World War II Germany and the internal representations they evoke are so divided, at least in the United States, nearly everyone he meets assumes he is not Jewish. This is the category in which he is placed, whereas in fact he lost two sets of grandparents in the Holocaust.

One day in his firm, a colleague approaches him in the hallway and, speaking of a senior partner, outside whose office they are standing, says, "He'll be out tomorrow celebrating Passover." There is something in his voice that troubles my patient, a hint of disdain, or amusement perhaps, or, clearly assuming that my patient is not Jewish, a desire to establish a bond at the senior partner's expense.

My patient swallows and says, "Yes, I will be celebrating Passover, too."

His colleague responds, "Oh. I didn't know." And there is an awkward silence. It is gone in an instant, but my patient feels a lasting, familiar, and complex anxiety. There is the anxiety of the colleague's insult; the anxiety of speaking up to him, exposing himself, and rejecting the tainted offer of friendship; and the anxiety of his colleague's response and further silence. But speaking up is preferable to passing for something he is not. Every moment of his life is an opportunity to feel either that he is an imposter, betraying his history and himself, or that he is invisible. The alternative is to call attention to his difference. We meet this anxiety in our work with gay and lesbian patients. They are put into categories that do not feel like who they are. This is true whether they are assumed to be straight, thus denying their identity, or gay, thereby obscuring, as Cole (2005) points out, "anything deeply meaningful" about them (p. 986).

Whether we see such categories as intrinsic to the self or as conflictual products, as social or intrapsychic in their origins, I would suggest that it is around difference, real and imagined, that our earliest and most primitive defenses gather to split our objects into them and us, the feared and the safe, the loved and the hated, the privileged and the excluded, the envied and the denigrated—the different. Ultimately, the categories that result are infused with the hated and persecuted parts of ourselves, projected and introjected in endless repetitions. But they evolve in profoundly individual ways, and, as with any trauma, external reality reinforces and shapes fantasy. By the time we see their manifestation in the transference, in my view, they appear as complex struc-

tures, each with its own mix of aggressive, erotic, defensive, and self-punitive components, the familiar components of compromise formation (Brenner 1982). I want to emphasize that I am not saying that all racism can be reduced to internal processes, or that racial and ethnic trauma is all of the same order or severity, only that such viciousness is ubiquitous and strangely easy for the analyst to disavow and not analyze, thus actualizing its apparent invisibility.

Consider a lawyer, raised a devout Catholic. He is speaking to me of an article he has read, written by, he says—and here there is a slight pause—“a Jewish fellow.” He says it in a bland, matter-of-fact tone, hardly noticeable except for its being an ethnic descriptive where none is needed. I imagine that he has, like my German patient’s colleague, assumed that I am not Jewish, that he is bonding with me by designating an other, and that he is further assuming that I will share his view. I say, “A Jewish fellow?” Catching my drift, he says a bit defensively, “Yes. It’s a fact.” I ask if there is something in my question that makes him uncomfortable. He says no and associates to his family of origin, who was, he says, “tolerant of everyone.”

Over time, I discover the following. My patient is from a wealthy Irish Catholic family and was raised in a city in which the Irish are part of the social aristocracy. His family, as it turns out, was very proud of its aristocratic ancestry. He tells me of castles in Ireland, of fortunes made and lost. Now, there are many complex differences in the immigration patterns to various cities in the United States, and in Boston, signs that read “No Irish” were once commonplace, anti-Catholic sentiment a part of Boston’s history. My patient speaks often of how intolerant Boston is, meaning, of course, how intolerant I am, and tells me stories in which he is the recipient of comments not unlike his own about the “Jewish fellow.” I know Boston’s anti-Catholic history and tell him so, but it makes little difference. I am one of *them*.

Once, when this man applied to a graduate program in a prestigious local university, the interviewer asked him where he had

gone to college. It turned out it was a Catholic college, to which the interviewer responded, "Why did you go *there*?" And when my patient said he would like to become a graduate student at the interviewer's university, he was told, as if to flatter him—for the man clearly liked him—that there had not been a Catholic student in the program for twenty years. My patient walked out.

As I got to know him better, the glow of his childhood seemed not so rosy. In fact, his mother appeared to have been seductive and cruel, his father sadistic, envious, and punishing, and my patient began spending long hours by himself watching gladiator films on television with an awakening erotic excitement. As he grew into adolescence, being gay became a welcome and private sanctuary from the fantasy that his parents wanted to harm him. Such fantasies were not totally unfounded. My patient was asthmatic and remembered his mother holding her hand over his mouth so that she would not be troubled by the sound of his breathing. Not altogether surprisingly, he developed a fantasy that she wanted to suffocate him and, later, that she might kill him inadvertently. But if he welcomed a place for safety and privacy, being gay was also a mark of his secret, devalued status in the family. Over time, he developed an interest in sadomasochistic sexual practices.

As the analysis proceeded, I began to feel that my patient was torturing me. This was not just in the teasing way that he would invite my interest and then close the door, but also in his use of categories in the transference. One form it took was his insistence that I was not only anti-Catholic, a cold and calculating analyst, who like his mother might do him in, but also a kind of "Jewish fellow," enviably smart, secure, and well positioned, but in the end discredited, despite my apparent wish to discredit him. This was, in part, a projection not only of his sadism, but also of his desperate aloneness and status as a devalued outsider. To my envious patient, Jews inevitably had loving families of the sort he had never known and protected one another in life, a support I provided to others but denied to him. On other occasions, I became



the very personification of Catholic authority, like the Pope, not this time Jew-hating but gay-hating, certain of my religious (psychoanalytic) principles, and ultimately, again like his mother, aiming to reduce him to a clone.

Being the recipient of these categories was a disturbing experience, as if I were being subjected to the sort of categorization with which he was only too familiar. We might call this process projective identification, producing those moments when the transference makes us feel quite unlike ourselves. To him and to me, I seemed for long periods to be *solely* the category to which he was assigning me, and insistently so. And it was only as we were able to analyze these categories in the transference that they opened to reveal their ingredients: his hatred, to be sure, but also his longing to be loved; his fury and envy that I might give my love to others; and his deep fear of a more genuine attachment, even as he was attached, as Dalal suggests, to the categories themselves and the hatred they both expressed and elicited.

On this latter point, my patient's deployment of these categories in the transference also had a provocative and ultimately both pleasurable and self-punitive purpose as he tried masochistically to arouse my ire so that I might hate him, too. Thus, it was as if his passion, which he desperately feared losing, depended for its expression on the use of such categories, static and passionless as they seemed to me, while the loss of them seemed to him like a kind of psychic death.

When I say that it was only as we analyzed my patient's use of these categories that we began to confront his own degraded image of himself, his compensatory elitism and racism, and his terror of loving and being loved, I do not mean to imply that the categories themselves had no external existence and no "causal" role in my patient's development and behavior (Dalal, p. 138). Only that, as they revealed their current purposes in his life and in the transference, his need for them and their grip on him seemed to fade, much as other fantasy structures fade when they take a different seat in our psychic economy, their use no longer so essential to our survival.

An important marker in all of this was the way my countertransference fluctuated with the category to which I was assigned. At one moment, I could experience myself as the tormenter and feel the wish to torment him, even to discredit him; at another, the shame of being the degraded one myself, bereft and alone; at yet another, I felt closed out, fighting for access; or denied personhood, invisible, and wanting to be known. My patient's categories are all not only object representations, but self representations as well. Notice in this regard how they leap from transference to countertransference and back again, each of us now the perpetrator, now the victim, so unanchored and fundamentally unstable are representations such as these.

I regard this as an experience not only of my patient's internal object world, but also of the "endlessly circulating process of repudiation and projection" of which Cole speaks. And as we began to sort this out, I could sense both in him and, more particularly, in me, the growing capacity within the analysis to relate not to a category, but to a person to whom I had become attached and for whom I had developed considerable fondness. And then our work could turn to the analysis of the most serious difficulty in his life, finding a partner with whom he could have an intimate, relatively trusting, mutually caring, simultaneously loving and passionate relationship.

With this patient, the hope of coming to understand his own use of these categories lay in the analysis of the transference, where the nearly invisible phrase "Jewish fellow" was situated at the junction of personal trauma, a deeply devalued self, and its projection in the form of sadistic ethnic and religious hatred. Such hatred infiltrates and seizes upon denigrated aspects of the self and the envy they spawn, becoming a mode of expression to designate who is to be repudiated and who is not. In light of this, I would suggest that whether racial, ethnic, and cultural categories originate as social or intrapsychic constructions or both, the process of categorization is a circular one that endlessly reinforces both its social and intrapsychic origins in ever more entrenched posi-

tions. Thus, the psyche grabs hold of social categories for defensive and conflictual purposes, and the world seizes on intrapsychic conflict to give it a vocabulary in the socialization and racialization of personal trauma, working it into the process of social categorization while shaping its expression in the transference.

Would this man's "racism" have been analyzed had I not picked up on his phrase "Jewish fellow"? Of course. There are many points of access in this and similar cases, albeit subtle ones: a slight shift in affect, an odd phrasing, a change of voice. Would his "racism" have been analyzed without ever addressing his use of categories? Perhaps. But I suspect not so thoroughly. When I first knew him, he was so convinced that he was the very personification of tolerance that I doubt his particular use of racial categories would itself have come under scrutiny without my confronting him, so unaware was he of its existence. If ignored, such habits commonly continue long after a relatively successful analysis, just as it is common for the issue of racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious difference and categorization never to be addressed in analysis.

If any of us were to review the patients we see in the course of a single day—or, for that matter, examine ourselves—I believe there is not one who has *not* both suffered and inflicted wounds of the sort I have described, so ubiquitous are they a part of our lives, as from the beginning we appear to attach ourselves involuntarily and promiscuously to racial, ethnic, and other differences, visible and invisible, to shape our representations of self and object.

Having said this, I want to emphasize once again that I do not mean that all forms of racism are equal in severity or kind, or that the traumas they cause can all be reduced to the analysis of categories in the transference. Being African American, for example, in a dominant white culture, and living with its continuous racism, silent or spoken, creates its own reality with its own traumatic effects, much as Apprey and Holmes in their papers, and Leary in her nuanced and masterful discussion, elaborate. It is, however, a reality that is greeted with the same disavowal that I am ascribing to the clinical situation—rendering it invisible.

I have spoken of several types of invisibility, each of them representing a form of unconscious racism. First, there is the patient who feels invisible, as my German patient did. Such patients may be invisible to the analyst who cannot see, or who sees and disavows what he sees. In this situation, not only is the patient invisible, along with the trauma he or she has suffered and its effects, but the analyst's blindness is also invisible—that is, unconscious—to him- or herself as well. But there is another form of invisibility, one that the analyst perpetrates when he or she fails to recognize the patient's use of racial categories, which may pass ever so quickly. If we do not see the patient's racism, the patient is paradoxically, once again, invisible. Each of these forms of invisibility stems from our own implicit and largely unconscious use of racial categories, by which we render patients invisible in precisely the way Ellison (1952) describes.

Before closing, I want to add a further word about our field. Holmes details the painfully slow progress we are making at the organizational level in bringing these issues into our teaching and educational policies. Another of our authors, Apprey, was asked at a conference this past year why so few people of color apply to be trained as analysts in the United States. His answer in a word was "money." It takes money. The audience was looking for a more sophisticated explanation, and in so doing overlooked the reality of race in this country—what Leary calls "the entire situation"—and thus once again rendered the problem invisible.

Sometimes we imagine ourselves to be free of the symptoms we analyze in our patients, especially when it comes to issues such as these. Lest we so quickly let ourselves off the hook, ask yourself, when you refer a patient, what role does race, ethnicity, culture, or, for that matter, sexual orientation, play in your choice of an analyst? To what degree are your decisions based on the needs of the patient and to what degree on your own discomfort? If you are a white analyst, how often do you refer a white patient to a black analyst? If straight, how often do you refer a straight patient to a gay analyst? In either instance, what crosses your mind as you decide? How do you use these categories?

I do not mean to suggest that any choice in these matters can be entirely free of racial or ethnic categorization and repudiation. As Layton notes (drawing on Dalal [2002]), “we cannot avoid racist enactments in the clinic, no matter what we do: we enact racializing processes when we bring racial difference into the consulting room, as well as when we deny the significance of such differences” (p. 247). Similarly, I feel certain that there is no referral of any sort in which those brief moments of categorization are absent, despite Cole’s observation that they describe nothing meaningful about the person.

A colleague of mine tells how one of his most cherished supervisors in residency, now an analyst, approached him about a referral of a potential analytic patient not long after my friend had finished his analytic training. But first his former teacher wanted to know one thing. “Are you Jewish?” he asked. My friend was not and told him so, but felt quite uncomfortable with the question. Although the supervisor said it had something to do with the patient, when she arrived there was no apparent reason for it. And then my friend said to me, “You know, I just realized he has made a number of referrals to me, and they have all been gentile.”

Our use of racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious categories, like those we ascribe to sexual orientation, is a deeply embedded and largely ego-syntonic process, and we may only know our own personal stake in it at moments of decision, or when it takes us by surprise. We offer this Special Issue of the *Quarterly* as a contribution to its further exploration.

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## TECHNICAL CHALLENGES FACED BY THE IMMIGRANT PSYCHOANALYST

BY SALMAN AKHTAR, M.D.

*This paper delineates the technical challenges faced by immigrant analysts. These include (i) maintaining cultural neutrality toward “native” patients, (ii) wondering about the patient’s motivations for choosing an ethnoculturally different analyst, (iii) scanning the patient’s associations for inter-ethnic clues to deeper transferences, (iv) negotiating the dilemmas posed by conducting analysis in a language other than one’s mother tongue, and (v) avoiding shared projections, acculturation gaps, and nostalgic collusion in working with homoethnic immigrant analysands. While by no means irrelevant to the clinical work of non-immigrant analysts, these tasks seem to have a greater importance for the immigrant analyst. Brief clinical vignettes are offered to illustrate these propositions and to highlight the tension between the universality of fundamental intrapsychic and relational configurations, on the one hand, and the nuances of cultural and linguistic context, on the other.*

An analyst living in his own country is less threatened by foreign values than an analyst working in a foreign country where he is deprived of the support of people who share his culture.

—Ticho 1971, p. 323

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The founder of psychoanalysis was an immigrant. Born in Freiberg, Sigmund Freud moved at the age of three to Leipzig, and about a year and half later to Vienna. These childhood migrations were not devoid of psychic impact. Freud “never forgot the forests around Freiberg”; and his “vocal, often reiterated detestation of Vienna” (Gay 1988, pp. 9-10) reflected not only the hardship, solitude, and anti-Semitism he faced there, but perhaps also the fact that Vienna was not Freiberg.

Despite such feelings, when Freud left Vienna for London at age eighty-two, the move was not entirely without pain. In a letter to Max Eitingon in June 1938, he noted that “the feeling of triumph at liberation is mingled too strongly with mourning, for one had still very much loved the prison from which one has been released” (Gay 1988, p. 9). Freud’s experiences of migration, however, occurred near the beginning and end of his life, and hardly affected his work as an analyst. The inner world of an immigrant analyst, therefore, did not capture his attention.

However, it is striking that few among the European analysts who fled to the United States and Latin America in the wake of the Second World War wrote about their experiences as immigrant analysts. Perhaps this omission was due to the reluctance of mainstream psychoanalysis to deal with sociological, historical, and cultural factors in adult life, in favor of an exclusive focus upon the intrapsychic residues of early childhood.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the great excitement these early analysts felt about their nascent discipline also led them to underestimate the cultural hurdles in its universal applicability. The fact that these European analysts were not actually immigrants, but exiles (see Akhtar 1999a for a discussion of the distinctions between the two), might also have contributed to their si-

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<sup>1</sup> Note the skepticism with which early post-Freudian forays into sociocultural realms—such as, e.g., Fromm 1950; Horney 1937; Roheim 1943—were received by the profession. Curiously, this attitude did not take into account the fact that Freud had a deep and abiding interest in the dialectical relationship between the workings of the individual psyche and the nature of social institutions. It was as if applied analysis and sociocultural extensions of theory and technique were deemed only the father’s prerogative!



lence on this issue. Wanting to forget their traumatic departures from their countries of origin, to deny cultural differences between themselves and their patients, and to become rapidly assimilated at a professional level, they had no desire to draw others' (and their own) attention to their ethnic and national origins. Hence, they wrote little about their experiences in practicing analysis as "foreigners."

Today the climate is different. Psychoanalysis, especially in the United States, is undergoing a major cultural rejuvenation (Akhtar 1998; Roland 1996). The increase in the number of people migrating from one country to another has resulted in significant shifts in the demographic makeup of industrialized nations, especially the United States and England. Along with an increase in culturally diverse patient clientele, there is also an increase in the number of culturally diverse trainees in psychology, social work, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis. Contemporary theoretical pluralism in the field is yet another factor that makes it possible, even necessary, to openly discuss technical matters of specific concerns with the foreign-born, that is, with the "immigrant" analyst—including, of course, myself.<sup>2</sup>

I will address five such matters in this paper. These include the immigrant analyst's need to (i) maintain cultural neutrality vis-à-vis his "native" patients, (ii) wonder about the patient's choice of him in particular as the analyst, (iii) scan the patient's associations for the interethnic clues to deeper transferences, (iv) negotiate the intrapsychic and interpersonal challenges of conducting analysis in a language other than his mother tongue, and, finally, (v) avoid shared projections, acculturation gaps, and nostalgic collusions when working with homoethnic immigrant analysands. Using abbreviated headings (for didactic ease) and brief clinical vignettes, I will attempt to illustrate these technical dilemmas

<sup>2</sup> I was born, raised, and medically trained in India. After finishing a psychiatric residency there, I arrived in this country in 1973 and repeated my psychiatric training in Newark, NJ, and Charlottesville, VA. I moved to Philadelphia in 1979 and completed my psychoanalytic training there.

while underscoring the overlap that such challenges have with those faced by non-immigrant analysts.<sup>3</sup>

## CULTURAL NEUTRALITY

An immigrant analyst is burdened by the task of maintaining cultural neutrality (Akhtar 1999b) in remaining equidistant from the customary patterns of thought and moral dictates of his own culture and those of the native patient's culture. While such tension also exists in the native analyst-native patient dyad, given that any two individuals can have different moral compasses, its magnitude is potentially greater in the immigrant analyst-native analyst dyad. This is especially true if the analyst has migrated as an adult (i.e., after stable psychic structuralization) and comes from a country that has pronounced cultural differences with his country of adoption. Thus, an analyst born and raised in Japan or Pakistan who practiced analysis in North America would face greater challenges in this regard than one born and raised in England or France. According to Gedo and Gehrie (1993):

The deck is stacked against an analyst's treating someone from an entirely different cultural background with no knowledge of that background. An analyst relies heavily on shared cultural meanings in any analysis, as in any sort of intimate communication. Possibilities for misunderstanding are so broad as to be endless and not correctable solely by reliance on empathy. [pp. 5-6]

Gedo and Gehrie cite the example of Mahler, who, as a fresh Hungarian Jewish immigrant, experienced considerable difficulty in understanding the cultural context of an upper-class Ameri-

<sup>3</sup> To be sure, immigrant analysts may have to struggle with matters beyond those of technique. For example, they might also experience specific difficulties during their training (in both didactic courses and supervision), and, later on, problems with assimilation and progress in their local and regional psychoanalytic organizations.

can woman analysand. Ticho (1971), a Viennese immigrant analyst practicing (then) in Latin America, described her disbelief that one of her male analysands had been frequenting a brothel and did not feel the necessity to mention it for years in his analysis with her. Ticho also mentioned a South American analyst who "took his patients' tardiness so much for granted, [that] he was somewhat surprised when he started to work in North America that his patients reacted quite strongly to his own lack of punctuality" (p. 317).

Being human and coming from a particular racial, religious, linguistic, and political group, the immigrant analyst undeniably has a cultural dimension to his or her personality, and this is indeed normal and healthy. What one hopes is that internalization of group legacies and repudiated instinctual residues in the analyst's character are not so aggressively charged as to form the substrate of prejudice (or, at least, that they no longer remain so following a personal analysis). That, combined with the mourning-liberation process (Pollock 1961) of immigration and the third individuation (Akhtar 1995) consequent upon it, should lead to a peaceful coexistence of ethnic facets of identity and heterocultural acceptance within the analyst's character. Studying of the material regarding the interface of social anthropology with clinical work, and leading an open, cosmopolitan life, will also help him avoid excessive culturalization of his analytic ego.

## THE PATIENT'S CHOICE OF AN IMMIGRANT ANALYST

The immigrant analyst needs to be curious about the patient's choice of him as the analyst with whom to undergo treatment. However, asking direct questions in this regard is hardly ever helpful. It can drive significant material (if it does exist) away from consciousness and behind socially appropriate ego defenses. Also, this gentle skepticism regarding the patient's choice should be tempered by the recognition that, at times, such choices have

no “deep” significance at all.<sup>4</sup> At other times, a seemingly mundane, early reference to ethnic matters might be the first hint of major transferences lying in wait.

### *Case 1*

A 40-year-old internist sought consultation with me for phobic anxieties. He came from a suburb and was unfamiliar with downtown Philadelphia. In his first session with me, he said that he was not favorably impressed by the city, and added with a snicker that “too many Vietnamese and Cambodian vendors seem to have moved in here.” When I noted the potential allusion in this remark to me, the patient quickly denied any ethnic anxieties regarding our working together.<sup>5</sup>

Once the patient was well settled in analysis, however, he began to display considerable prejudice against Asians. He regarded Indians as especially incompetent. Still later, he sheepishly revealed that he had deliberately sought an analyst who would be incompetent so that he would not be hurt too much in undergoing analysis. In other words, my expected incompetence would save him from coming to terms with his shame-laden aspects. Projection of his own feelings of being weak and incompetent vis-à-vis his older brother and father were gradually discerned, as were hidden masochistic desires to be mistreated.

While in the beginning, a patiently curious attitude on the part of the analyst is ideal, the demands made by some patients call for limit setting from the outset. Only then can an investigative collaboration be set in motion.

<sup>4</sup> Only about a third of my patients have revealed significant conscious or unconscious motivations involving my immigrant status in their choice of me as their analyst. Moreover, there are immigrant analysts who are not recognized as such by patients: Canadian, British, Irish, and many European analysts practicing in the United States, for instance, are *invisible immigrants* (Shanfield 1994) owing to their skin color and their cultural and linguistic proximity to North American culture and language.

<sup>5</sup> This was too many years ago, in the sense that my manner of asking then was perhaps too direct, and might have contributed to his defensive withdrawal.

*Case 2*

A young Jewish internist, whose father was a Holocaust survivor, called me seeking psychoanalysis. She was well-informed about analysis and had been given my name by an elderly Jewish analyst. While setting an appointment on the phone, she asked me: "Are you an Arab?" I responded by saying that, while I was interested in her question and what lay behind it, I could not answer it on a factual basis. I added that if we were going to undertake any kind of in-depth work together, my real-life situation was less important than what she made of it in her mind. The patient, however, persisted, saying, "Look, I am a devout Jew and an ardent Zionist. I know that if you are an Arab, your sympathies in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will lie with the Palestinians. And I am not about to give my money to someone who will support terrorism against my own people."

I was taken aback by this sadomasochistic proclivity under a thin patina of ethnic rationalization. I responded by repeating what I had said, adding that if she found herself willing to tolerate ambiguity and investigate what had already begun to take place, then perhaps we could meet. Otherwise, she might have to go elsewhere. She came for her appointment and entered analysis with me.

In the subsequent six years or so, the patient, who turned out to be neither a devout Jew nor an ardent Zionist, underwent a rather stormy analysis.<sup>6</sup> Provocative limit testing and recall through enactment pervaded the early phase. Three themes took center stage, in succession, though also intertwined with each other: (1) the Holocaust and her contradictory identifications with her father's survivor guilt (Niederland 1968) and his persecutor's sadism, (2) separation guilt (Modell 1984) involving a depressed mother, and (3) a negative oedipal defense against guilt-ridden, positive oedipal strivings. These shifts, interestingly, were

<sup>6</sup> In fact, it was toward the end of her analysis that the patient began to be comfortable with her ethnic identity. For the first time in years, she went to a synagogue, and, during the services, found herself thanking me in her heart!

associated with changing perceptions of my ethnicity: first, as an Arab (equated in her mind with a Nazi), then as an Indian Muslim (equated in her mind with a Jew, since both represented minorities), and, finally, as a reasonably assimilated, immigrant North American.

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The foregoing vignettes illustrate the admixture of defensive and fantasy-based motivations for seeking a culturally different, immigrant analyst. Unconscious hope of finding an important lost object of childhood can also underlie such choice. In my practice, a deep and unmourned attachment to a Chinese housekeeper or a black nanny of formative years has often fueled the patient's choice of analyst. A partial "reunion" with the lost object seems necessary for such individuals to work through the complex feelings attached to the early caretaker, who had often abruptly and prematurely left them.

## PATIENTS' ASSOCIATIONS TO ETHNOCULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Shifting transferences such as those described above, and their corresponding ethnic metaphors, warrant that the analyst constantly scan the associative material for disguised and displaced references to his own ethnicity or race (Abbasi 1997; Holmes 1992; Leary 1995).<sup>7</sup> If the analyst comes from a country or region known to be culturally quite different, and especially if the analyst's skin color is different from the patient's, then he is certainly "more than just a blank screen, and his . . . color will pull forth a rich va-

<sup>7</sup> In a paper striking for its clarity and comprehensiveness, Abbasi (1997), an immigrant Pakistani Muslim analyst, describes her treatment of an immigrant Jewish patient, offering details not only of the transference-countertransference material, but also of the analyst's own concurrent analysis, as well as the manner in which this material was handled in her clinical supervision. Sripada (1999), a Hindu psychoanalyst of Indian origin, has also written meaningfully about his experience in cross-cultural supervision during his candidate years.

riety of projections and stereotypes" (Tang and Gardner 1999, p. 8; see also Ticho 1971). Holmes (1992) notes that such "points of access to a patient's transferences" (p. 8) give rise to rich associations that need to be carefully deciphered. However, this activity should not occur at the cost of sacrificing interest in other meanings of the patient's material. It should be remembered that a seemingly ethnic allusion in the patient's associations can serve as a defense against the emergence of deeper transference configurations.

### *Case 3*

A middle-aged, Jewish exile from Poland was in analysis with an Iranian Muslim, immigrant woman analyst. The patient's family of origin had been devastated by the Holocaust, and his reparative strivings toward his parents were great. He especially ached for the humiliation and suffering of his father during the anti-Semitic atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis.

One day, during the third year of his analysis, his analyst announced that she was going to take the following Monday off, thus extending the weekend to a three-day break. The patient responded by saying, "I know why you are taking the day off. It is the holy month of Ramadan and perhaps some important day of prayer coming up." While this was plausible (since it indeed was the month of Ramadan), the analyst felt skeptical about the readiness with which the patient came up with an instinctually "clean" rationale for her day off. There was a defensive quality about it. So she commented, "It's interesting that you thought of a reason that is relatively sanitized, hence excusable." The patient felt uncomfortable in response to this intervention, but could not put his finger on the source of his unease.

In the next session, the patient reported a dream. He was lying on a table and an older man, who was holding a pin in his hand, was about to prick him in the inner side of his thigh. He woke up feeling anxious and puzzled. Associations to the dream revealed that the older man with the pin stood for his tailor father

(who often used pins in his daily trade), and the close proximity of “pin” to “prick” betrayed his dread (and, underneath that, his wish) of being penetrated by his father’s penis. As this material surfaced, the patient’s discomfort at the analyst’s previous day’s intervention came up for consideration. Now it appeared that, when the analyst had questioned the readiness with which he had come up with a relatively sterile reason for her absence, the patient had a passing thought that she was taking time off to spend a long weekend with her husband. Perhaps she would make love with him. This material got repressed but reappeared in the dream, where the patient replaced the female analyst with the idea of being penetrated by an older man (her husband/his father) and also *became* her, as it were, to deny their separation and the anxious fantasies associated with it.

Attention to such overtly ethnic clues to deeper transferences should not make the analyst overlook the fact that not every utterance the patient makes about people of the analyst’s ethnicity and race is transferentially significant. A robust tension between skepticism and credulousness must be maintained.

## THE ANALYST’S BILINGUALISM

The burgeoning literature on bilingual psychoanalysis (Akhtar 1995, 1999b; Amati-Mehler, Argentieri, and Canestri 1993; Buxbaum 1949; Foster 1993, 1996; Greenson 1950; Grinberg and Grinberg 1989; Karpf 1955) suggests that words with the same denotative meanings in two languages are often capable of stirring up different associations and affects. Grinberg and Grinberg (1989), for instance, report an Austrian patient who would say, “In German, the word ‘urinal’ smells of urine” (p. 110). It has also been noted that memories recalled in the actual language of an experience are more affectively charged and vivid than if they are recalled in a different language (Javier and Munoz 1993). Moreover, a bilingual individual’s self-expression in his “primary” or first language tends to internally “shift the specific aspect of the self that is speaking and the object . . . that is being



spoken to" (Foster 1996, p. 248). All this, combined with Ferenzi's (1911) early observation that obscene words in one's mother tongue carry a much greater affect and drive discharge potential (hence, greater superego admonition) than those in a later acquired language, renders bilingual analyses especially tricky for both analysand and analyst.

However, the literature cited above focuses upon the patient's defensive and expressive play with more than one language. The bilingual analyst's own language-related inner experience has remained unexplored in the literature. This is surprising, since an immigrant analyst often conducts treatment in a language other than his mother tongue, and this must, from time to time, impact his analytic capacities. For instance, early in his career, and especially if he lacks idiomatic fluency in the patient's language, the analyst might occasionally miss puns, double-entendres, metaphors, or allusions. While the golden rule is "when in doubt, ask," one hopes that such a need would not arise too frequently, and that when it does, it would not be inappropriately inhibited.

The analyst's requests for clarification should not be restricted, however, to inquiries about unfamiliar words or phrases, but should extend to asking about an abrupt pause in the flow of the patient's speech. Occasionally, this can unmask unexpected anxieties regarding the analyst's ethnicity, and, behind them, deeper transference-based concerns, as illustrated by the following vignette.

#### *Case 4*

An attractive, midwestern, Catholic lawyer began an analysis with me to overcome her depressive proclivities and enhance her capacity for deeper heterosexual relationships. During a session in the third month of her analysis, she said: "You know, I used to get depressed on Sundays. I felt so lonely. But nowadays, I don't get depressed at all. In fact, if I feel the slightest feeling of gloom coming over me, I say to myself that I have . . . ," and the

patient stopped abruptly in mid-sentence. After a moment's pause, she finished the sentence by saying "... you in my life."

Noting the hesitation in her manner of speaking, I asked, "What made you pause abruptly? Did you change something in your mind in order to finish the sentence?" The patient then reported that she was about to say that "I say to myself that I have Dr. Akhtar in my life." She explained that she had changed *Dr. Akhtar* to *you*, adding that saying it that way seemed more direct to her, and made us seem, in her mind, more closely related.

I responded, "Yes. I can see your point. Yet by changing what was coming to your mind and what you do really say to yourself, you might have created distance between us. I also wonder if there were other reasons leading to your switching the words." The patient then revealed that she had felt anxiety in pronouncing my name in my presence. She feared that if she did not pronounce it in the "correct" way, I would regard her as different from me, and this would make her feel distant, rejected, and sad. She also wanted to protect me from feeling like a foreigner by her bringing attention to my ethnic-sounding name. In essence, neither of us was to feel rejected by the other. Exploration along these lines led to unearthing of lifelong concerns over feeling unacceptable in her family of origin.

The mention of the immigrant analyst's ethnic-sounding name brings up the larger topic of his mother tongue. The occasional desire of the immigrant analyst to intervene in his mother tongue (when the patient would not understand it) usually has to be met with ego restraint and further grief work regarding the analyst's own feelings about having immigrated.<sup>8</sup> What is also needed at such moments is self-analytic inquiry into the specific transaction that triggered such a wish. In other words, the analyst must ask himself the following questions: What was in the patient communication that made me want to respond in my mother tongue? Did the patient's words or feelings touch something deeply personal

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<sup>8</sup> In a sad commentary upon the long-lasting effects of Western colonialism, analysts from third-world countries seem to experience a greater reluctance about speaking in their respective mother tongues.

in me? What? And—in a return to a more objective stance—would it be useful to say the idea in my mother tongue and then translate it for the patient? Or should I just offer a translation? What is the advantage of the former? What would be lost by taking the latter route? Would speaking in my mother tongue traumatize the patient or impart genuineness to the relational matrix?

### Case 5

My analysand, a young internist, was looking after an elderly, hospitalized man. Both of them were avid gardeners and often exchanged notes about their hobby with each other. In her analysis, the patient told me one day that the old man had given her some seeds that she was planning to plant in her backyard over the weekend. She was excited because the seeds were for a very rare type of flowering plant. Her choice of words such as *old man*, *backyard*, *seed*, and *flower* clearly constituted thinly veiled allusions to an oedipal transference fantasy. However, more important for the context, here is what happened the next day.

The patient began sobbing as soon as she entered my office. Her patient had died the previous night. She cried and asked, “What good are those seeds now? I can’t tell him how they fared. Did the flowers come out or not? It’s all useless now. I’m just going to throw the seeds away.” Listening to this, I was moved. The urge to say the following in Urdu came over me: *Sub kahan, khuch laala-o-gul mein numayan ho gayeen*. This line, from the doyen of Urdu poetry, Mirza Asad-ullah Khan Ghalib (1785-1869), is one of two constituting the couplet:

*Sub kahan, khuch laala-o-gul mein numayan ho gayeen.  
Khaak mein kya sooraten honghi, jo pinhan ho gayeen.*

[Ghalib 1841]

Roughly translated, these lines mean:

Not all, only a few of the buried ones emerge as flowers:  
The earth’s bosom hides so many faces, talents, and powers.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Translation by the author.

Given my cultural background of an ethnic and familiar tradition of offering rejoinders in the form of a single line of a famous poem, it was the perfect empathic remark to make.<sup>10</sup> It would have conveyed to the listener that I resonated with her pain, helplessness, and sense of loss. However, in the clinical situation, where the patient did not understand my mother tongue, I chose not to speak the words that had come spontaneously to my mind. I realized that uttering these words and then translating them would shift her attention from felt pain to intellectual effort; hearing me speak in a different language might disturb her.<sup>11</sup> A comment intended to be empathic with her mourning would have become just the opposite, a manic defense. So I did not say it. However, in not saying it, I tolerated my helpless feeling that she was not linguistically receptive to me—just as the elderly man was no longer available to her in reality. Like the patient, I also experienced a loss.

### *Case 6*

At another time, however, I did speak in my mother tongue, Urdu, to another patient who, while multilingual, did not know that particular language. This patient was an intelligent and successful woman in her thirties. Her parents had divorced when she was seven years old, though she had sensed her father's increasing remoteness for a year or two before that. Following the divorce, the patient felt "invisible" to her father, who paid much more at-

<sup>10</sup> Upon hearing this vignette, a prominent New York analyst said that the idea of reciting poetry in a psychoanalytic session would appear pompous and exhibitionistic to him. The differences in the intellectual and aesthetic traditions that formed our childhoods and our psychostructural backgrounds might account for the difference in what, stylistically, is permissible within our psychoanalytic work egos.

<sup>11</sup> During a post-termination contact some five years later, I shared this dilemma with the patient; this time I did utter the words that had been in my mind in Urdu many years earlier. I asked her how she might have responded had I spoken to her in my mother tongue during that particular session. The patient, who had little memory of it, said that she would have been shocked. It was her sense that my decision not to speak to her in my mother tongue was most likely correct.

tention to her older sister and brother. The theme of her “invisibility” came up frequently in her analysis and was found to be linked, at its base, to an early maternal depression and a pervasive maternal tendency to invalidate the patient’s feelings. It was also related to her father’s lack of interest, as well as her own defensive retreat from being “visible” to him, since that stirred up all kinds of longings and desires.

We worked this through, and the patient established a solid romantic partnership with a man. One day, she asked me the word for *daughter* in my mother tongue. I responded by saying that I was curious about what lay behind her question. Fantasies about my having a daughter emerged. The patient expressed curiosity about how I treated my daughter: better than her father treated her, or the same way? Work along these lines led to further oedipal transference material, as well as issues of sibling rivalry (her older sister had been the father’s favorite).

However, when, in a similar session a few days later, the patient again asked me the Urdu word for *daughter*, I responded by saying, “I guess you want to hear the word *beti* from me not only to satisfy your intellectual curiosity, but also to see with what tone and feeling I utter it, and so that I can say it not only in front of you, but as if *to* you.”

The patient nodded and began sobbing. I knew that I could have made the same interpretation without the use of the Urdu word, but felt that the patient’s hearing it would provide just the right amount of gratification to her against which further mourning of her father’s inattention (and her anger about this) could take place. I am aware that some colleagues would argue that this gratification bypassed the analysis of her aggression. I do not agree with that view, as there were plenty of other occasions for her discharging and analyzing aggression, and because I believe that good analytic technique calls for optimal, rather than maximal, frustration in order for the patient to remain in an analyzable mode.

These examples of linguistic dilemmas of the immigrant analyst should not make one overlook the fact that similar dilemmas

are faced by non-immigrant analysts, too. Defensive alterations of language (e.g., from an instinctually charged word to a sanitized expression) happen in monolingual therapeutic dyads as well (Amati-Mehler, Argentieri, and Canestri 1993; Foster 1996).

## HOMOETHNIC IMMIGRANT ANALYSANDS

A major, perhaps “final” step in the consolidation of an immigrant analyst’s work-related identity is constituted by the analyst’s treatment of immigrant patients, especially those of similar ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds to the analyst’s own. This brings him face to face with new dilemmas and challenges. The potential for *shared ethnic scotoma* (Shapiro and Pinsker 1973), in which taboo topics remain unexplored, and/or aggression can be displaced onto ethnoculturally different “natives,” is now increased. Other types of countertransference collusions can also occur

. . . especially when the therapist identifies closely with the patient’s experiences. The therapist may be more tolerant and less confrontational about some instances of acting out. When this identification is strong, the therapist is often tempted to go the extra mile for the patient . . . . It is a temptation to reach out to such patients, in the sense of being somewhat more didactic and helpful about the process itself. [Tang and Gardner 1999, p. 16]

Greater than ordinary vigilance might be needed to unmask and interpret *cultural rationalizations* (Akhtar 1999b, p. 122) of intrapsychic conflicts under such circumstances.

### Case 7

A married, Indian Muslim law student “accidentally” became pregnant soon after beginning analysis. She felt quite upset about it, and, though she was certain that she did not want a child at this time, she said that she could not have an abortion. When I asked her about this, she retorted that I should know that abortion is prohibited in Islam. Now, having known her for some time, I

knew that she was hardly an observant Muslim. Indeed, she loved to drink, smoked cigarettes, and was defiant of other traditions from her culture of origin. As a result, I was surprised by her using a religious explanation for her hesitation to terminate an unwanted pregnancy.

Bringing this discrepancy to her attention helped the patient see that her reluctance to have an abortion was related to a deeper, personal conflict. On the one hand, having just entered law school, she did not want the burden of having a child; but on the other hand, she was terrified of the surgical intervention of abortion. Exploration of these issues and of the dynamics behind her having gotten pregnant at this time (e.g., filling herself up so that she would not feel orally and erotically needy in the transference) freed her ego to make a relatively remorse-free decision in favor of abortion.

### *Case 8*

In the realm of language, too, new and interesting challenges for the analyst might appear, as exemplified by the case of a 50-year-old, Hindu Indian woman, who had been raised by an instinctually repressed (and repressive) family in South Africa. She chose to speak mainly in English during her analysis. As early fears of criticism and rejection were interpretively softened, a devalued self-image emerged. While childhood experiences of prejudice due to skin color were emphasized at first, analysis gradually revealed profound rejection by her mother, a rejection centering upon her being female. Work along these lines relaxed the patient further, and she occasionally began to speak in Hindi, her mother tongue. During one such session, she very hesitantly revealed that she did not know the word for the female genital in Hindi, and felt that it would help her to acquire this knowledge. Issues of maternal transference (such as: Could the analyst label her body parts for her? Could the analyst know and accept that she had female genitalia? Could the analyst accept “his” female genitalia?, and so on) were clearly evident, and I handled them in the customary analytic fashion.

However, in a later session, the patient quite earnestly asked me to tell her the Hindi word for female genitalia. Suddenly, I found myself experiencing a dual dilemma. One was purely technical—i.e., what would be the process-related pros and cons of telling her the word versus inquiring why she wanted to know it from me, and so on. The other dilemma that caught me by surprise involved my personal morality, as it were. Could I even utter the word in my mother tongue (given that spoken Hindi and Urdu have the same word for the female genital) in the presence of a woman? Experiencing the inhibition outlined nearly a century ago by Ferenczi (1911), I became for a moment tongue-tied.<sup>12</sup>

Then, working through my inner block and in the spirit of “developmental work” (Pine 1999) that includes occasionally providing patients with words for what is hard for them to express, I decided to tell her that it was called *choot*. I was aware of the potential transference gratifications in this intervention, but the subsequent flow of our work confirmed my hunch that letting her hear the word from me would facilitate and not impede our access to that material.

### Case 9

In contrast to the situation mentioned immediately above, an analyst who has been an immigrant longer than the patient might have lost proficiency in their shared mother tongue. Listening to the richer vocabulary of the patient might stir up powerful inner affects (e.g., envy, shame) in the analyst. Kogan (1999), a Romanian immigrant analyst living in Israel, gives a poignant account of such a situation during the analysis of a Romanian woman who had recently arrived in Israel:

<sup>12</sup> Recently, a young Iranian analytic candidate said to me: “I will die if I have to say the words for *sex* and *genitals* in Persian to a patient.” I smiled and encouraged her to explore this issue further on her own, as well as in her analysis. I also reassured her that she was not alone in experiencing such anxieties, adding that even Freud lapsed into the Latin *matrem nudam* when describing in a letter to Fliess, at age forty-one, his childhood memory of having seen his mother naked (Masson 1985, p. 268).



Anna spoke to me in Romanian; her use of language seemed to me to be very elaborate and beautiful. Using my mother tongue . . . had a strong emotional impact upon me. I felt excited and somewhat intimidated. My mastery of the Romanian language is relatively good, so I am often told. But relative to whom?, I now asked myself, listening to Anna. My intimidation stemmed from a very deep and personal experience, which echoed in me a world of purely private experiences . . . . Nothing was more distant from my professional occupation than the language of my childhood and adolescence. Was I able at all to do analysis in this language, so cut off from my professional career?

Moreover, my simple, not very elaborated language put me in the position of a child, especially when confronted with the beautiful language of my “grown-up” patient. I began to wonder if this special situation, in which the therapist finds himself linguistically disadvantaged, with all its emotional implications, may not have a disruptive effect on the treatment. [pp. 3-4]

In such analyses, patients’ nostalgia is also hard to handle. This is because the lost objects, evoked in an idealized way, are from a culture that is shared by patient and analyst. On the one hand, this allows the analyst to have a finer and more intuitive empathy with the patient’s experience. On the other hand, it also makes him vulnerable to a *nostalgic collusion*, in which the defensive functions of waxing eloquent about lost places and things are left unanalyzed (Akhtar 1995, 1999a, 1999b; Freedman 1956; Sterba 1934; Werman 1977). Tensions of this sort bring the immigrant analyst one step closer to native-born colleagues who are exposed to such technical challenges on a daily basis.

### *Case 10*

Finally, in working with homoethnic immigrant analysands, the analyst must negotiate the *acculturation gap* (Prathikanti 1997) that at times exists between the two parties. This was highlighted for me in my work with the following patient.

A Muslim Indian woman announced, during analysis, that she was seriously thinking of getting engaged and married to a man whom she had met only twice. One of these meetings was in the presence of their families, who “arranged” the encounter. The other was exclusive, consisting of a lunch and a stroll in the park. She said that the next step should be engagement, followed by marriage.

My immediate reaction to this was to feel shocked. How could she think of marrying someone whom she had met just twice? Shouldn’t she know him better? Shouldn’t she have sex with him before thinking of getting married to him? However, I kept all this private and allowed myself time to think. Then it occurred to me that there was much difference in our value systems in this regard, and, at least in some ways, this difference was due to our contrasting migration histories. She had been in the United States for only two years, and I for nearly thirty years. Her ways were consonant with her original cultural background; they were conflict free. My response reflected my Westernization and my post-migration superego and ego changes. Recognizing this difference between us permitted me to resume a peaceful and unintrusive stance toward her.

Clearly, the immigrant analyst is faced with clinical pitfalls and technical challenges in working with both “native” and fellow immigrant patients. Work with each brings its own challenges, and yet, when all is said and done, it all boils down to conducting an analysis, no matter what the hues and colors of the dialogue might be.

## CONCLUSION

The central message of this paper is two pronged. On the one hand, it delineates the specific technical challenges faced by immigrant analysts. On the other hand, it upholds the essential similarity of human beings across races and cultures and the applicability of the psychoanalytic method to all psychologically minded individuals, regardless of racial, ethnic, or religious background.

The analyst's personal analysis and mourning over immigration determines his capacity to work peacefully with individuals of diverse cultures. Continuing work on both these fronts—i.e., ongoing self-analysis and mourning—also matters a great deal.

The analyst's ability to maintain optimal distance (Akhtar 1992; Bouvet 1958; Escoll 1992; Mahler, Pine, and Bergman 1975) between his own hybrid identity and his native patient's monolithic one, and his homoethnic immigrant patient's differently acculturated one, is critical. Ultimately, the analyst's deep conviction of the universality of fundamental psychic configurations and the ubiquity of human conflicts will help him hear and understand (both within himself and his patients) "voices that are not necessarily unified and not unifiable" (Amati-Mehler, Argentieri, and Canestri 1993, p. 283), while continuing his analytic work.

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## WHITENESS

BY NEIL ALTMAN, PH.D.

*This paper seeks to make meaning of the experience of being white in the United States at this point in history. The self-awareness of white people is limited by a blind spot around the meaning and impact of being white in a multi-racial society. Using psychoanalytic and literary methodology, the author seeks to cast light with which to explore this blind spot. Everyday experiences are used to illustrate the widely pervasive impact of race in the lives of white people, and a clinical vignette illustrates how race might show up in a white-on-white psychotherapy. Enactments within this paper are noted when they are evident to the author.*

## THE FACE OF RACISM IN 2006

In the post-civil-rights-movement United States, there is considerable controversy and confusion about the degree of prejudice and discrimination on racial grounds that persists in our society. There is a sharp divide between white Americans and African Americans on this point. Listen to the following summary of two surveys that appeared in *Whitewashing Race: The Myth of a Color-Blind Society* (Brown et al. 2003):

African Americans are deeply disillusioned about the future. At the turn of the millennium, seventy-one percent of African Americans believed racial equality would not be achieved in their lifetimes or would not be achieved at all. Seventy-three percent of African Americans believed they were economically worse off than whites. White

Americans, on the other hand, are unduly sanguine about the state of Black America . . . . The difference of opinion [between whites and blacks] could not be deeper. Almost three-quarters of African Americans think they have less opportunity than whites, while almost three-fifths of whites think blacks have the same opportunities they have. [p. 224]

Similar conclusions were reached in a recent *New York Times* series on "How Race Is Lived in America." The *Times* (2000) reported that "blacks and whites continue to have starkly divergent perceptions of many racial issues and they remain largely isolated from each other in their everyday lives, according to a nationwide poll by the *New York Times*" (p. A1).

Brown et al. (2003) attribute this gap in perception to the fact that whites, believing that they themselves are not racist, extrapolate that society as a whole is no longer racist in the wake of the civil rights movement, and therefore measures to reduce inequality, such as affirmative action, are no longer required. Thereby overlooked are two types of factors that contribute to persisting inequality on a racial basis:

- (1) *Systemic and institutional factors* that transcend the prejudice or willful discrimination of individuals, but nonetheless account for persisting inequality. An example here would be the pervasive relative underfunding of ghetto schools.
- (2) The *historical dimension*, that is, the ways in which past discrimination set processes in motion that continue today, putting blacks at a disadvantage in comparison to whites. An example here is the way that black wealth accumulation has been hindered by the fact that the mere presence of blacks in a neighborhood makes property values go down. Since most Americans' wealth is accounted for by the value of their homes, there is an inevitable discrepancy in wealth accumulation that has pervasive consequences in the lives of black people.

Aside from being influenced by historical and institutional factors, individual whites may be unaware of their own personal discriminatory behavior and attitudes. Here is an example from experimental social psychological research<sup>1</sup>: Word, Zanna, and Cooper (1974) told white Princeton students that they were to act as interviewers in a study of interviewing techniques. Half the people whom the students interviewed were black, and half were white. The study found significant differences in nonverbal behavior of the interviewers, depending on whether they were interviewing white or black people. With black interviewees, the students sat farther away, made more speech errors, and ended the interview sooner. In the second part of the study, the researchers found that when white interviewees were subjected to the same patterns of nonverbal behavior as the black interviewees, their performance suffered. This study thus shows how black people can be discriminated against in job interviews with white interviewers, for example, without there being any consciously held discriminatory purpose.

Gaertner and Davidio (1986) conducted a series of studies demonstrating what they called, following Kovel (1970), *aversive racism* among liberal, consciously nonracist subjects. Kovel differentiated between what he called *dominative racism*, involving overt oppression of people, and *aversive racism*, involving avoidance of black people by white people. Dominative racism is more characteristic of the Old South, in which whites blatantly oppressed blacks, but lived in close proximity to them. Aversive racism is characteristic of the North and perhaps of the New South, in which white people do not, at least on an individual level, oppress black people; they simply avoid them by living in suburbs far away from urban ghettos, and even from integrated suburbs.

Gaertner and Davidio demonstrated, for example, that liberal white subjects are more likely to help a black person pick up a spilled container of pencils when the black person is defined as

<sup>1</sup> This research is summarized in Wachtel (1999).



their subordinate on a task than when the black person is defined as their superior. Gaertner and Davidio interpreted this finding to indicate that white liberal people are more comfortable with black people in subordinate positions than with those in superior positions.

In another study, Gaertner and Davidio (1986) demonstrated that white liberal subjects would more likely accept help on a task from black people than from white people when the help was offered, but less likely actively to solicit help from black people than from white people when it was not offered. The researchers interpreted this finding to indicate that white liberal subjects went out of their way not to reject help offered by blacks, so as not to appear racially biased, but that an underlying discomfort with blacks was evident when they had to decide whether to ask for help.

Another angle from which to look at persistent racism is provided by studies in psychoanalysis, cultural criticism, and literary criticism that address the ways in which attitudes are shaped—out of conscious awareness—by how we are socialized, by the cultural attitudes and values we imbibe, and by the ways that discriminatory attitudes and values are built into the structure of our language. On a psychological level, we can consider how guilt and shame about white privilege, or, more accurately, about white people's attachment to white privilege, contributes to the formation of a blind spot about the meaning of whiteness in the minds of whites.

From this point of view, progress in eliminating de jure forms of discrimination is only the first step in addressing unconscious racism on the part of white people, no matter how consciously well meaning they might be. Just as the historical legacy of racism leads to ongoing economic consequences that it would take positive action to reverse, so the historical legacy of racism as it is built into language, culture, and values calls for positive efforts at painful self-scrutiny. Let us begin to examine this by taking a look at *whiteness*.

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WHITENESS

Consider for a moment the unreflectiveness of many white people about the meaning of their whiteness. If you ask white people what it means to them to be white, many will greet you with a blank stare. For many whites, whiteness is a kind of baseline or standard; it does not refer to a particular ethnic or racial group. This meaning of whiteness is implicit in the use of the color *white* to refer to people whose color is actually more like pink than white. Whiteness suggests an absence of color, a way of thinking that nonwhite people adopt when they refer to themselves as “people of color.” The fact is we are all people of one color or another. If white people referred to themselves as pink people, they would join the club of those who have one color or another and would be just like everyone else.

But as the baseline, the standard, white people are very special people, the uniquely standard people. Many Americans similarly regard English as the standard language, not one among many languages. When I lived in India as a Peace Corps volunteer, some of the other American volunteers could not seem to believe that the villagers with whom we lived and worked actually did not speak English. They would speak English to the villagers, and when they were not understood, they would *raise their voices* as if the only possible explanation was that the villagers were hard of hearing.

Another example in this connection has to do with e-mail addresses. E-mail addresses outside the United States have a country code at the end, such as *ca* for Canada, *uk* for England, *it* for Italy, and *ar* for Argentina. The United States is the only country that has no country code, as though the United States lacked the particularity of all other countries.

In a recent study, Jacobson (1999) points out that whiteness in the early history of the United States meant “fit for self-government” (p. 7); originally, only people of Anglo-Saxon origin were considered fit to govern themselves. Each new immigrant group, from Europe or elsewhere, were originally not considered white

in this sense. Similarly, Ignatiev (1995) points out that early Irish immigrants, based on their experience of oppression at the hands of the British, were inclined to identify with black slaves in the United States. But when they realized the social and economic advantages that would accrue to them if they sought a white identity, many Irish turned anti-abolitionist. Thus, adopting racist attitudes was one way to seek entree to a privileged position.

Nonwhite people, on the other hand, can easily tell you about the particularity of white people, about the particular ways of white people as a group. We white people may need to turn to nonwhites to learn about the meaning of whiteness. West (1993), Morrison (1993), and others have pointed out that whiteness as an identity category depends on the existence of blackness; in this sense, blackness is the background against which whiteness appears.

Morrison (1993), in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, writes about the construction of whiteness in America, noting that images of blackness, black people, and black culture have been taken up and transformed by the imaginations of white writers. Morrison argues that one can know white people in the United States by seeing the uses to which they put images of black people. This is an essentially psychoanalytic method, in the sense that an analyst might come to know something about a person in the “others” whom he or she dreams about, in the uses to which the dream puts those others. Of equal interest to Morrison is the way that critical studies have failed to notice what she calls the *Africanist* presence in the works of literature she considers, and the difference this presence makes. She thus points out the blind spots that tend to form around whiteness in the American consciousness (a topic to which I will return shortly).

A case in point is *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Twain 1884): Morrison points to the controversies about the ending of this novel, which strikes many critics as unsatisfactory in that it reveals that the supposedly runaway slave, Jim, has actually been free for some time, unbeknownst to himself and to Huck, following which revelation Huck takes off for the “territories,” and the novel ends. Critics are befuddled; what a lame ending to an otherwise

great book! Twain perhaps did not know how to end the book, so he left it hanging in mid-air.

What these critics miss, according to Morrison, is the way that Huck's development as a free and autonomous human being requires the "nigger" Jim's enslavement.<sup>2</sup> Jim's presence as a slave is necessary in order for Huck to appear free. Thus, the novel cannot follow Huck into his new life as a free man in the territories, as the quintessential unfettered American, precisely because Jim is also free. On this reading, then, Twain's ending constitutes a reflection on the use to which he has put the so-called Africanist presence in his book.

Morrison's (1993) more general point about the role of freedom in whiteness, and the role of an implicit blackness, begins with the idea that European immigrants came to these shores seeking freedom—religious freedom at first, but also freedom from the constraints of class and tradition. But the yearning for freedom did not make them exempt from what she calls the "terror of human freedom" (p. 37). What better way to hold onto a receding and problematic sense of freedom, asks Morrison, than to enslave a group of people, defined as "other," in contrast to one's own group, whom one feels is free? In this context, whiteness comes to signify freedom, and blackness signifies constraint, enslavement. Whiteness and blackness, freedom and enslavement, constitute each other. The stronger the need to be free and the greater the terror of freedom, the more one needs to create slaves.

This point about whiteness and freedom is illustrated by Roth's (2000) *The Human Stain*. Reputedly based on the life of the literary critic Anatole Broyard (Staples 1994), this novel tells the story of a black man, Coleman Silk, who spends virtually his entire adult life passing as white. The book begins with his being accused of racism at the university where he is a dean. In a class that he teaches, two students do not show up for the first few sessions, at which time Professor Silk asks if the two missing students are

<sup>2</sup> See my comments on the use of the word *nigger* in the concluding section of this paper, p. 70.

“spooks.” It turns out that they are African American, and Silk is accused of making a racist remark. He ends up resigning his post in protest at not being supported by his colleagues or by the college, never revealing that he himself is African American.

Roth then takes us through Silk’s history. Highlights include his having dated a white woman—a very white woman, an Ice-lander. After years of intimacy, he takes her home to meet his family, where she discovers that he is African American. Afterward, she ends the relationship, saying she “can’t do this.” Eventually, Silk marries a Jewish woman. He informs his mother that he intends to pass as white, and thus she will never be allowed to meet his wife and children, but if she wants to see his children, he will tell her that they will pass a given park bench at a certain day and time. Silk’s brother then orders him never to be in touch with their mother or the rest of the family ever again. At the end of the story, Silk’s wife has died, he has resigned his job, taken up with another white woman, and then dies together with her in an automobile crash.

In my reading, *The Human Stain* is a story of how everyone who becomes white in the United States does so. If an ideal of the United States is to be free to remake oneself in whatever way one chooses, then, following Morrison, to be white means to believe that you *can* be whatever you choose to be. Whatever status you were born with can be transcended. You can be upwardly mobile; you can surpass your parents’ class status; your ethnicity can be subsumed in your whiteness. To be human means to have this freedom to some degree.

But of course, no one is fully free to leave behind his or her former selves. Blackness, then, comes to represent that which cannot be left behind, that which constrains one’s freedom to be whatever one chooses. Slavery and the indelibility of skin color represent this counterpoint to the white American dream, initiated by Europeans who came here seeking a new life. Roth’s (2000) protagonist, Professor Silk, is everyman and everywoman, the white American who becomes white by denying that he is something else, but who is haunted by what he tried to leave behind.

Hemingway's (1986) *The Garden of Eden* tells a similar tale, in my reading. This is the story of newlywed expatriate Americans. The wife decides she wants to get her hair cut like a boy, then asks her husband to do the same so that they look just alike. She also tries to darken her skin by becoming as tanned as possible, while also dyeing her hair as white as possible. Thus, she is experimenting with remaking both her gender and her race. She and her husband eventually fall in love with the same French woman. The affair ends disastrously.

In my reading, the garden of Eden is alluded to in this story as that state in which one is simply whom God made one to be. The apple from the tree of knowledge is the human—not just American—capacity and tendency to try to remake oneself, and thus to take upon oneself responsibility for who one is. This is also a metaphor for the fiction writer's project, the project of creating worlds. So the polarity of whiteness and blackness in the United States stands for the polarity of freedom and determinism in human life.

In considering Hemingway's (1986) and Roth's (2000) works, one encounters a skeptical, if not jaundiced, view of the American ideal of remaking oneself. Problems arise, in my view, when one loses the dialectical relationship between being free and being determined, when one fails to take account both of our human capacity for freedom *and* the ways in which that freedom is limited. Splitting off freedom from constraint results in either the idealization of freedom (as in the American dream) or in an insistent embracing of that which one is born into (as in Hemingway's [1986] work).<sup>3</sup> When one cannot tolerate constraint, this aspect of human nature must be projected onto someone else. Thus arise some of the psychic forces that, along with economic and other factors, give rise to oppression and slavery.

<sup>3</sup> According to Lynn (1987), Hemingway's mother put up the pretense that Ernest and his sister, Marcelline, were twins of the same sex. She dressed him in a way that suggested he was a girl, long past the age that this was customary at the time. She also dressed and groomed him in rapidly shifting ways. I suggest that this experience led Hemingway to associate *flexibility* of identity with a *grandiose imposition* of identity.

Another perspective on whiteness arises from Morrison's (1993) question, in the same book mentioned earlier, about the impact of racism on those who perpetuate it. Keep this question in mind as we consider her discussion of Cather's (1940) novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, set in the United States of the nineteenth century. Sapphira Colbert is a white invalid confined to a wheelchair and dependent on slaves for her basic physical care. She is obsessed with the idea that her husband is having an affair, or longing to have an affair, with Nancy, a slave girl. The novel makes it clear that Sapphira's suspicions are totally without foundation. Her husband is portrayed as so without lust as to be utterly boring; Nancy is portrayed as naive.

Nevertheless, Sapphira arranges to have a lecherous nephew, Martin, visit, with the idea that Martin will seduce or rape Nancy, thus somehow making Nancy less palatable to her husband. Sapphira takes no care to hide this plot from Till, Nancy's mother—completely oblivious to the possibility that Till might have any reaction to the idea of arranging to have her daughter raped. Eventually, Sapphira's daughter manages to help Nancy escape to Canada, so that Sapphira's plot is foiled.

What Morrison wants us to notice about this story is the “reckless, unabated power of a white woman gathering identity unto herself from the wholly available and serviceable lives of Africanist others” (1993, p. 25). She comments that “this novel is not the story of a mean, vindictive mistress; it is the story of a desperate one” (p. 25). “The self she constructs must be—is conceivable only as—white. The surrogate black bodies become her hands and feet, her fantasies of sexual ravish and intimacy with her husband, and, not inconceivably, her only source of love” (p. 26).

In other words, in Morrison's reading, Cather (1940) has given us a picture of a white identity that is disabled, impoverished, by the projection onto black people of caregiving and sexuality. The privilege of whiteness is shown to amount to an illusory power, the power to destroy oneself.

This perspective on whiteness brings us to the work of Baldwin, who, in *The Fire Next Time* (1993), defines whiteness in terms of privilege. Privilege, economic and political, is associated with being white; privilege is sought in order to provide an illusory sense of safety and security. Baldwin sees the lives of white people as impoverished to the extent that an unending search for an elusive sense of security precludes a life-enhancing embrace of risk, change, and transience. Baldwin (1993) puts it like this:

Renewal becomes impossible if one supposes things to be constant that are not—safety, for example, or money, or power. One clings then to chimeras, by which one can only be betrayed, and the entire hope—the entire possibility of freedom disappears. [p. 92]

Thus, what looks like privilege in terms of money and power and safety is actually a seductive mirage that sets us up to be incapable of dealing with the realities of life and death.

The studies of Morrison (1993) and Baldwin (1993) highlight the defensive function of the construction of whiteness for white people. The fantasy of whiteness is a way in which whites seek to ward off feelings of lack or of ordinariness, i.e., a lack of specialness or privilege and a sense of unfreedom or constraint. Like all defenses, a price must be paid for their use; as Baldwin in particular points out, there is a consequent constriction of experience of the human condition, with all its vulnerability and risk that can yield pain, but also joy.

Whiteness is thus an omnipotent fantasy, a fantasy of mastery and fullness. There is nothing inherently pathological about the impulse for mastery; indeed, much of what makes us human in a positive sense, many of the ways we have found to be safe and productive, depends on what has been called *effectance motivation* (White 1959). What makes the fantasy of whiteness a pathological defense is the way it is paired with blackness as its disavowed double. The search for mastery becomes problematic when it becomes so desperate that it must entail the construction of a sub-



jected group of people and the disavowal of one's own helplessness—i.e., when the experience of helplessness is warded off, rather than integrated with the experience of mastery.

History provides abundant examples of how the fantasy of mastery has taken the form of mastery of other people, a sadomasochistic, dominant-submissive form. This fantasy has been actualized in the form of colonialism, slavery, discrimination in housing, access to employment and education, and in myriad other forms of prejudice. A fantasy of any system of race and social class is that human vulnerability and powerlessness can be overcome by achieving economic and political power and privilege; an illusory sense of power and privilege can be obtained by setting up a contrast with a disempowered and underprivileged other. To the extent that the construction of racial categories is driven by the white need for a degraded other, racism is inherent in race, in the construction of whiteness/blackness. Most fundamentally, racism is a symptom, a manifestation, of an underlying disease that might be defined as an organization of experience around power, or a dominant-submissive structure that affects all of us, black and white alike.

There are many symptoms of this disease on both social and personal levels: sexism, homophobia, racism, classism, social ethnocentrism, political imperialism, and sadomasochistic personal relationships. The work of Foucault (1980) has been valuable in demonstrating how the power structures of our society organize our ways of thinking—for example, how psychoanalytic developmental theory, focusing on the Oedipus complex, privileges heterosexuality and patriarchy.

And then there is the desperate seeking of, and clinging to, privilege, as in the frantic rush to get one's children into just the right college or nursery school, or the need to have more and more money, or things or status or prestige. It is as though people know on some level that the chase is futile, but have to run faster and faster to avoid admitting this to themselves.

Finally, there is the problem of guilt. Damage is done to people who are subordinated; acknowledging this damage forces one to confront one's own sense of destructiveness. The knowledge that one has hurt someone one loves and cares about is extremely hard to bear. This is a problem on a national level in the United States, where the damage done historically by slavery, discrimination, and genocide, and the damage done in a highly competitive, capitalist context, runs up against American ideals of equity and equal opportunity. When guilt cannot be tolerated, the solution is often to deny that damage was done or to blame the victim. Thus arises a vicious circle of prejudice, in which prejudiced beliefs and discriminatory actions serve both to ward off guilt and to create further guilt.

McIntosh (1998) delineates dozens of privileges that white people have, but black people do not. Examples include being able to enter stores without attracting fear, hostility, and suspicion; being able to live in a place where one wants to live and feel assured that the neighbors will not be hostile; and being able to turn on the television and see people of one's own race. I would add to these the ability to walk past a police car without being afraid, and to hail a cab with the expectation that it will stop for you.

I found myself surprised at many of McIntosh's examples, having never thought about what life is like for black people in those particular ways, although it does not take much pondering to understand what she was telling us about black and white life. McIntosh herself notes that she repeatedly forgot her own examples of white privilege until she wrote them down. This is one of the main manifestations of white obliviousness to what it means to be white. To come to terms with the privileges associated with the color of one's skin provokes guilt, especially when one realizes that one is unwilling to give up these privileges. To realize, further, how hollow are these so-called privileges takes more courage and insight than most of us can muster most of the time.

## PSYCHOANALYTIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF BLACKNESS AND WHITENESS

Baldwin (1993), addressing himself to his nephew, advises:

You can only be destroyed by believing you really are what white people call a nigger<sup>4</sup>. . . . You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. [p. 4, p. 7]

The process Baldwin refers to here, whereby people take on the image of themselves that is held by the dominant group in society, can be elucidated by a brief excursion into psychoanalytic theory, as follows.

It is now generally accepted that race is a social construction. There is no biological basis for race, in that genetic variation within the groups called *black* and *white* is greater than genetic variation between the groups. Even on a phenomenal level, skin color, facial features, and any other physical characteristics used to distinguish races exist on a continuum; they are not organized as a polarity. Recent studies suggesting differential occurrence of diseases among racially defined groups (Hummer, Benjamins, and Rogers 2004; Hummer, Rogers, Nam, and LeClere 1996), or differential responses to certain pharmacological agents among racially defined groups (Bloche 2004; Burroughs, Maxey, and Levy 2002; Lee, Mountain, and Koenig 2001), might appear to complicate this picture of race as a social construction. But the problem that is often overlooked in the design and interpretation of such studies is the process by which population groups are defined in racial terms.

There appear to be clear differences among various populations in the incidence of sickle cell anemia and Tay-Sachs disease,

<sup>4</sup> See my comments on the use of the word *nigger* in the concluding section of this paper, p. 70.

for example. Sickle cell anemia is well understood as having been selected for in African populations because it confers protection against malaria. The presence of a gene for sickle cell anemia points to African ancestry, while the presence of a Tay-Sachs gene points to Jewish ancestry. Do these facts lend support to the biological reality of race? Would they support the reality of a Jewish race (and a non-Jewish one), as much as they support the reality of a black race (and a white one)?

Dalal (2002) argues that concepts of racial difference arise from political considerations, to differentiate the “haves” from the “must not haves” (p. 14) and to justify colonial domination. Sternberg, Grigorenko, and Kidd (2005) point out that there are many ways to classify populations found to be statistically different on some genotypic or phenotypic trait. But why do we settle for classification of these populations on a racial basis? It is interesting to note that Sternberg, Grigorenko, and Kidd find that human beings have become genetically programmed to enjoy fat as a way to accumulate nutritive substances for periods of deprivation; today, the result is often high rates of obesity. How are we to understand population differences in rates of obesity? “Whether, ultimately, people with a genetic predisposition toward fatness will be classified as being of a separate race remains to be seen” (p. 50).

In summarizing, Sternberg, Grigorenko, and Kidd (2005) state:

One could pick any of a number of traits correlated with geographic patterns and find correlations with other related traits . . . . It would . . . be foolhardy to group fairly arbitrary sets of traits and characteristics that one then reifies as being natural, somehow God-given categories. [p. 50]

In other words, when one finds genetic or biological (statistical, not invariant) differences between populations, one must still go through a process of defining that population one way or another in order to make meaning of the findings. Because racial categories are part of the language we are born into, there is a

temptation to take these categories as “God-given,” without examining the political, economic, and psychic motives for their origins. We have constructed race as bipolar, as literally a black-and-white phenomenon, and we use these categories unreflectively much of the time. We must keep in mind that the seemingly purely descriptive terms *black* and *white* are inaccurate on even cursory examination, as noted above.

So whence the need to keep the races so separate? I suggest that, on a psychological level, racial categories are constructed as they are in the service of a need to construct a self, an individual self linked to a group self, by constructing a not-me other—just as, on the socioeconomic political level, they are constructed for purposes of domination and control. Thus, the social and psychological levels are analogous to each other. The splitting off of blackness by white people is part of the construction of a *bounded, masterful self*, in Cushman’s (1995) term, a self that reflects the ideals of the sociocultural surround.

Psychoanalysts often describe processes of psychic construction of self and other in terms of the concepts of projection and introjection. The psychoanalytic concept of projection contains the idea that people try to rid themselves of particular feelings and impulses by attributing them to others. These other people must be perceived as different enough from oneself so that one can disidentify with them and the qualities that have been projected onto them. On the other hand, they must be similar enough to oneself, even if only by virtue of their humanity, to permit some sort of negative link, e.g., hatred, to be maintained.

To the extent that we wish to believe that our violence, our greed, our exploitiveness, our passivity, and our dependence are “out there” and not “in here,” then the “other” group, the group that is both similar and different, can easily come to represent what Sullivan (1953) called the *not me*. Sullivan’s locution is most felicitous: the *not me* is, of course, *me*—the disavowed me.

Now consider the way in which blackness in America gets constituted out of white projections. For white people in this country, black people are, to one extent or another, the *not me*.

White people, like all people, wish to rid themselves of certain psychic qualities, often sexual and aggressive ones, which are in fact inherent in all human beings. This is another explanation for the choice of the words *white* and *black* to characterize people whose skin color tends to vary somewhere along the pink-brown continuum. With *black* and *white*, the twain never meet, and psychological similarity is denied.

Having parts of oneself projected into others creates an unstable situation. The disavowed position is always there, haunting the self, requiring continual warding off. For example, white people who justify repressive police tactics in black ghettos by a belief in the essential violence of those who dwell there must continually reinforce the denial that police repression itself is also a form of violence. Any crack in the armor of this racist belief might let in the sense that there is a vicious circle of violence between the police and ghetto residents, so that we are all implicated in that violence.

Before illustrating these points with real-life examples, I want to note that, when an other is constituted out of projections, the other's independent subjectivity is denied. As oppositional categories, constituted as mutually exclusive, blackness and whiteness can be discussed only within a racist framework in which there can be no mutual recognition. Thus, this paper in itself enacts racism in a fundamental way. Within the racist discourse of black and white, it is better to reflect on the meaning of whiteness than to let it stand as the unmarked standard. But we must still not lose sight of the goal of mutual recognition, in which the other is recognized in his or her full particularity, both similar to and different from the subject.

### *Two Cases in Point*

Commonplace examples may illustrate the complexity of these dynamics in the real world. First, imagine a white person and a black person approaching each other on a dark, isolated street at night.<sup>5</sup> I am deliberately leaving the genders undefined for now.

<sup>5</sup> See Staples (1994) for a discussion of this kind of situation.

I am also referring to situations that are ambiguous enough for there to be plenty of room for projection or alternative assessments of the situation.

Suppose the white person quickens the pace and crosses the street. On one level, he or she may be making a plausible assessment of a potentially dangerous situation on the basis of stereotypes, in the absence of any knowledge of this particular black person as an individual. Plausible as that assessment might be, another white person, equally plausibly, might not have felt threatened at all, while still another might have had a passing moment of concern, but not strongly enough to cross the street. While granting that all these reactions may have reasonable justification, we might also note that the difference between the white person who *does* cross the street and the white person who *does not* do so may relate to the extent to which the negative stereotype of the black person is fueled by the defensive need to disavow certain psychic qualities in the mind of the white person.

The specific nature of what is being projected is revealed, at least in part, if we get specific about the genders of the people involved. If the white person is female and the black person is male, the stereotype is likely to involve sexual aggression, whereas if both people are male, the stereotype is likely to have to do with non-sexual physical violence. If the black person is female or if both people are female, these stereotypes may not be active at all.

Switching to the black person's perspective, he or she experiences the white person's act as a violent imposition of an extremely negative stereotype onto him or her. When we take account of the black person's perspective, we can see that, while the white person's experience is of fear of a violence that is "out there," his or her belief in the dangerousness of the black person provides a way to avoid experiencing the violence generated by his or her own fear, as well as the guilt that would attend such awareness.

Stepping back to a perspective that includes that of both parties, one can say that the white person's fear is *both* plausible *and* defensively motivated stereotyping. If it turned out that the black

person involved was, in fact, a mugger, it would have been folly for the white person *not* to cross the street. It might have seemed that, in an effort to avoid feeling racist, the white person failed to take account of potential danger. Thus, the nature of the white person's act in crossing or not crossing the street, in being afraid or not being afraid, is to some extent only assessable in retrospect.

Here is a second example, contributed by a white female colleague: She described walking to a beach in the country to cool off on a hot July evening. When she got to the beach, she saw only one person, a black man. She hesitated, caught between fear and the concern that she was about to enact a racist stereotype by turning and walking away. Then she noticed that the man had a little girl with him. He had come to take his daughter swimming. In the mind of my colleague (though not, of course in reality), the man had been transformed from a rapist into a devoted father.

To add to the complexity of such situations, it can happen that the black person has in fact turned to criminal behavior in part as a function of having internalized the societal stereotype. Fonagy et al. (2002) have recently described how a person's sense of self derives from the perceived experience of that self in the minds of others. Fonagy et al. speak of the formative influence of the parent-child interaction, but one might also extend this idea to the societal level, where black people are continually subjected to the white world's stereotypes all around them—in the media, in schools, stores, and on the streets. Aside from these considerations, there are more indirect ways in which denigrating stereotypes about black people might foster criminal behavior via economic discrimination of various types.

Of course, the roles of those meeting on the street in the situation described above could be reversed. The black person might be afraid that the white person is a violent racist, and this might be both a plausible assessment of the situation and a defensive projection, at least until the course of events makes the nature of the situation more clear. White Northerners in the United States might have heard that there are many places in the rural South where it is not safe for black people to be out at night, but in fact



one does not have to go to a particular part of the country to find such danger; in recent times, innocent blacks have been killed on the street—just for being there—in Howard Beach (Queens), New York (*New York Times* 1987), and in Jasper, Texas),<sup>6</sup> to mention two well-publicized examples. There was also a killing by police in the case of Amadou Diallo in the Bronx, New York (*New York Times* 2005).

### *Introjection and Projection*

*Introjection* refers to the complementary process whereby people take in psychic qualities from other people. One of the most malignant consequences of white projection of denigrated qualities onto black people is that black people can introject the image of the self that they see in the minds of white people.<sup>7</sup> To the extent that black people come to believe that their identity is defined by their image in the minds of whites, white projections become not merely a fantasy in the minds of white people, but also, in fact, black people can become the dumping ground that whites need in order to deny their own negative qualities, in the service of constructing an idealized image of themselves.

In a predominantly white society—one with stereotyped images of black and white pervasive in the media, for example—the influence of white perceptions of black people on black people's self-images is very powerful. Some of the appeal of black separatism in the post-civil-rights-movement United States, I believe, derives from the wish of blacks to free themselves from the undermining impact of these denigrating images.

As Fonagy et al. (2002) have recently shown, human beings first get a sense of their own minds by perceiving the ways in which other people, their parents in the first instance, hold them in mind. The history of slavery and racism in the United States has

<sup>6</sup> See Ainslie 2004 for a powerful account of the killing of James Byrd.

<sup>7</sup> This process is what Baldwin (1993) warned his nephew about, referring to the danger of believing that "you really are what white people call a nigger" (p. 4); see the discussion on p. 70 of this paper.

posed a formidable negative factor for black parents to struggle against in maintaining a positive self-image, necessary in order to convey to their children a similar positive image of themselves. Many African Americans have found ways to resist racist images of themselves and to maintain strength in the face of white oppression.

As pointed out by the feminist antiracist writer bell hooks (1995), one key to such resistance and strength is to avoid embracing a sense of victimization, and not to disavow rage. She indicates that white society tends to encourage a sense of victimization precisely in order to disable rage. Feelings of rage, further, are pathologized and rendered unduly alarming in the skewed media focus on crime by black people, for example. Owning a sense of rage, hooks emphasizes, is empowering and strengthening of efforts to resist oppression.

When people's images of others are constructed too heavily out of projections, the other's subjectivity as a separate person is denied or occluded. There is not enough room for the *otherness* of the other person. Slavery, of course, constitutes an effort at complete denial of the subjectivity of the slave—although, as the philosopher Hegel pointed out, the master needs the slave to recognize him or her as master. Thus, the master must erase the subjectivity of the slave while at the same time being dependent on it; otherwise, his recognition is without value.

This psychological dependence on the slave to consolidate the master's identity is part of what Cather (1940) was portraying in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*. Morrison (1993) notes both the erasure of the character Nancy's subjectivity, inherent in her being referred to as the "slave girl" rather than by her name (even in the title of the novel), and, at the same time, the fact that Nancy's mistress, Sapphira, is utterly dependent on her.

The projective-introjective processes I have been describing never work in the manner intended. When people disavow significant aspects of their sexuality and their aggression, for example, they deplete themselves of considerable vitality as well. Here is another way that white people are dependent on black

people: not only to preserve a positive self-image, but also to maintain contact with the positive aspects of themselves that they have disavowed. Thus, Sapphira needs Nancy in part because Nancy has become the container for her own disavowed sexuality; Sapphira's depletion is portrayed quite literally in her being wheelchair bound.

## CLINICAL ILLUSTRATION

In a recent publication (Altman 2004), I described a white patient of mine, Elena, who came from a working-class background. She was upwardly mobile, a graduate student in one of the professions, working in a middle-management position.

In negotiating our fee arrangement after a discussion of the patient's financial situation, I offered her the choice of a lower fee if she would take an "off hour" in my schedule, or a higher fee if she wanted a "prime-time" hour. After first accepting the offer of an "off hour," Elena came in to the next session saying that she did not want to be a "second-class citizen." As the treatment evolved, she spent much time talking about her position as a middle manager, in which she felt a great loyalty to, and a sense of protectiveness toward, her working-class staff, while also feeling tremendous resentment toward her superiors, who were professionals.

Eventually, we came to an understanding that conflict about her own upward mobility was a factor in making this situation very compelling for Elena; on one hand, she wanted to remake herself as a professional, but on the other, in doing so she felt that she was betraying her working-class origins and her family—in short, her working-class self. Her work situation allowed her to move beyond her socioeconomic origins while also demonstrating her loyalty to members of that class, thus counteracting her guilt about pursuing middle-class status.

My offer of a lower fee for an "off hour" set off an (at first) unreflective enactment of these issues. Having accepted the mid-day hour and the lower fee, it seemed to Elena that she was putting herself into a second-class category, so that she then changed her

mind and chose to pay more in order to feel like a first-class citizen. Instead of feeling privileged by virtue of paying a lower fee, she came to feel privileged by paying a higher fee.

At the moment when Elena felt that paying less made her a second-class citizen, middle-class values came into play, thus triggering a sense of having left behind and betrayed her working-class self. This psychic situation was represented in our sessions by her narrative about her protectiveness toward her staff and her resentment toward her professional superiors. My offer had seemed to present her with the choice of either accepting second-class status as a working-class person, or going for middle-class status by paying more. I was unable to help the patient with this constellation of feelings until I could reflect on the psychic level of what was happening when she opted for the higher fee.

My attention here, quite concretely, was on the amount that I was to be paid. Let me add some personal background about my own financial situation at the time as the context for this preoccupation: I was paying private high school and private college tuitions for my children, with fantasies of providing a privileged future for them by virtue of an elite education. I also wanted to save enough money so that I could give them sufficient resources to enable them to be free to choose employment that was meaningful to them, rather than having to take work on the basis of what would pay enough to meet their needs. Thus, attention to my own aspirations toward whiteness, in terms of privilege and freedom—just as much as to the patient's aspirations—was necessary in order to understand the psychic and social forces structuring our clinical interaction.

In the light of considerations having to do with the dialectic of freedom and constraint that I am focusing on in this article, I will elaborate a bit further. Elena's upwardly mobile aspirations can be framed as a desire to remake herself as a professional woman, what I have described here as the prerogative of whiteness. Likewise, I was trying to ensure a future for my own children that would give them options, that would allow them to do whatever they wanted to do. Seeking such freedom is the privilege of whiteness, but I wish to argue here that the longing for freedom is a

conflicted longing; there is a price to be paid for the goal of re-making oneself.

In Elena's case, the upwardly mobile journey led to feelings of loss and guilt, which in turn led to symptomatic self-defeating paralyzes of her functioning. It was as though part of her, given no voice in our work together, was declining the opportunity to seek the freedom to remake herself, sabotaging the part of her that strove in that direction. I, preoccupied with my own quest to provide opportunities for my children, did not have enough distance from such aspirations to be able to reflect on the patient's conflict, or to see the price she was paying for her upwardly mobile strivings. I was paying a price also—in terms of overwork, financial anxiety, less quality time with my family, and so on. Thus, part of the burden of whiteness is the *imperative* to remake oneself, as well as the creation of a blind spot around the price to be paid for efforts in that direction, in terms of a loss of one's personal roots and a driven way of life.

I am not attributing what happened between Elena and me to our *actual* whiteness (whatever that might mean), but rather to the degree to which each of us was organized, however conflictedly, by the psychic structure, values, and pursuits that I refer to as *whiteness*. Most importantly, I suggest that the unawareness of the workings of whiteness in interactions such as ours limits analytic consciousness-raising efforts, in ways such as those I have tried to demonstrate.

## CONCLUSIONS

I have sought to demonstrate in this article that, despite all the important anti-racist advances in the legal structures of the United States and in the conscious minds of many of its white citizens, there remain critical forces at work perpetuating racism, which operate below and outside of the white radar screen. These forces are built into the political and economic structures of our society, into the value systems by which we were raised, into the selves we construct in an effort to feel good about ourselves. It is very difficult to be aware of these forces.

On the socioeconomic political level, capitalist and imperialist structures and value systems preexist our own existence—we are born into them, so we easily take them for granted in ways that can impede critical reflection. Such critical reflection can provoke reactions of resistance and threats of excommunication, as exemplified by the implications of words like *communist* and *unpatriotic*, when they are deployed to refer to those who raise questions about the power structures of our society.

On the personal level, self-structures, reflecting cultural value systems, arise so early in life that they are prereflective, given, and difficult to break away from. Psychoanalysis and critical social theory both attempt to get a handle on these forces, on the personal and cultural levels, respectively, that constrain us, that are built into us. These disciplines are thus crucial to the consciousness raising that is the vital next step in efforts to be aware of—so that we can partially transcend—racism and prejudice as they exist today.

I have tried to demonstrate that literature, too, can be invaluable in our consciousness-raising efforts. Let me offer one more literary example: Faulkner's (1936) *Absalom Absalom!* This novel is about a man, Thomas Sutpen, who comes out of nowhere with a band of "wild niggers" and a French architect, and buys 100 acres in Mississippi to create a plantation.<sup>8</sup> It is revealed in the course of the narrative that Sutpen's obsession with being a plantation owner arises from a formative experience in his childhood as a poor white boy, during which he was forced to enter a rich white family's house through the back door.

Faulkner thus shows us how the plantation system rested on the efforts of whites to ward off the experience of degradation that is inherent in an inequitable socioeconomic system. Degraded status gets transferred onto blacks, onto the primitive, wild "nigger," counterpoised to the cultivated French architect. But Sutpen, like all of us, contains both the cultivated and the primitive. Given his terror of degradation, he must continually ward off the awareness of who he really is or who he fears he is.

<sup>8</sup> See my comments on the use of the word *nigger* on p. 70 of this paper.

Faulkner renders this reality by organizing the narrative around the way the characters cope with the secret that Sutpen had, earlier in his life, married a black Haitian woman and fathered a child by her. This child later developed a friendship with Sutpen's son by a white woman, and became the fiancé of Sutpen's daughter by his white wife. Faced with the prospect of his son's marrying his daughter, Sutpen orchestrates a situation in which his white son kills his mixed-race son. The secret of racial mixing, the horror of miscegenation on the social level, stands as a metaphor for the fact of the psychic racial and socioeconomic multiplicity of all of us, as well as for the constant threat this poses to white efforts to occupy a privileged place in an inequitable society.

I will conclude by expressing a moment of anxiety concerning my use of the word *nigger* in this article. In writing this paper, I initially thought that I was using this word only to accurately portray the writing of others (Baldwin 1993; Faulkner 1936; Morrison 1993; Twain 1884). It did not at first occur to me even to formulate questions of my subjectivity, nor to consider how my use of the word *nigger* might affect an African American reader (a case of rendering black subjectivity invisible to myself). But then I asked myself, having received the responses of others who read drafts of this article, where is my own subjectivity in the process of using this word in the way I did, putting it into, as well as taking it out of, the mouths of others, as it were?

Reflecting on this question, I have a sense of "getting away with murder," as it were, in being able to use this word while attributing it to others—as well as horror about this possibility, and a sense of relief that perhaps I would be able to leave no telltale traces of my own racism. I have a strong belief in the "irreducible subjectivity" (Renik 1993) of all expressions, so it should have raised a red flag for me to find that I could use such a highly charged word without knowing that I was expressing something about myself. You, the reader, will draw your own conclusions. I offer my experience in writing this paper and in receiving the responses of others as an illustration of what I hope is the central point of this paper, highlighting the blind spot that many white

people have around race and African American subjectivity. Consciousness raising, let us hope, goes on . . .

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## DIFFERENCE AND THE AWAKENING OF WOUNDS IN INTERCULTURAL PSYCHOANALYSIS

BY MAURICE APPREY, PH.D.

*In many analyses, patients and analysts alike consciously or unconsciously wound each other. In intercultural analyses, these woundings may take on an extra bite. The author suggests that treatments can be viewed according to the following phenomenology: There are (1) sedimentations of history, which are (2) reactivated, and (3) subsequently extended to serve new and contemporary purposes via the inscription of intentionality. If the analysis is well presided over, the violence of difference may reveal significations that exceed the particular, entering into a general and transcendent sphere. Concrete and syncretic matter becomes symbolic and produces a transformation from the primitive origins of a phenomenon to new, motivated, and plural structures of experience.*

### INTRODUCTION

Three basic assumptions subserve the account of intercultural psychoanalysis given in this paper. First, it is suggested that *human beings reveal their most intimate secrets through the exceptions; but they freeze that which appears to be an exception long enough for us to see ourselves in it.* In this respect, intercultural analysis gives

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us vivid access to particular human experiences and, in turn, informs other clinical experiences. Second, in the translation from *the events of history* to *a sense of history* (Husserl 1997), analysands take the sedimentations of history, reactivate them in the transference, and add an intentional dimension that carries the plea, demand, warning, or admonition of which they want their analyst to take notice. Third, in dark and primal caverns of our minds, *difference is simultaneously a provocation and an invitation to push the analyst to remember with the analysand*. In this respect, taking the negative transference, housing it, and transforming it is a privileged technical aspect of intercultural psychoanalysis.

Before venturing further into the field, let us hear three voices from two patients and a psychoanalytic candidate, in order to fire our imaginations.

1. "I am scared of you.  
You are an African.  
You will eat me up."
2. "You are like the native aborigine—in the movie *Walk-about*—who rescues a boy and his sister after their parents kill each other. He taught them how to survive in the wilderness."
3. "Where do you get off speaking knowledgeably about the Holocaust?  
You are very polished.  
You have not suffered."

Michel de Certeau (1997), the French human science scholar and author of *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, considered that what is foreign is that which escapes from a place. In the first quotation above, the foreigner who escapes is a presentation, not a representation, of *the cannibal*. In the second, a representation escapes: a foreigner who rescues after the presentation of a double murder. In the third, sadistic envy escapes, driven forcibly into a foreigner who dared to give speech to an unspeakable crime: the slaughter of millions of human beings.

Here are de Certeau's (1997) elaborative comments:

*What is foreign is first of all the "thing." It is never where the word is. The cannibal is only a variant of this general difference, but a typical one since he is supposed to demarcate a boundary line. Therefore, when he sidesteps the identifications given him, he causes a disturbance that places the entire symbolic order in question . . . . The cannibal is the figure on the fringe who leaves the premises, and in doing so jolts the entire typographical order of language. [pp. 70-71, italics added]*

We might note that my two patients and the analytic candidate quoted above "signify not the reality of which they speak, but the reality from which they depart" (p. 71).

Why am I discussing this? In the world of intercultural analysis, *difference may not be tolerated*. Black and white quintessentially are opposed. In this world, there are evocations of *lacerations, injury, wounds, murder, assassinations*. This is a *concrete, material world, a dark place* where, to quote the poet Georges Blin (1945), "Anything that has integrity is a provocation to us" (p. 44). Gaston Bachelard (1943) would add that "One might debate endlessly the primacy of sadistic instinct or seductive images in this response. One might say, in support of the first view, that sadism actively seeks out objects to carve up, to wound" (p. 28). In such a world, then, instincts awaken in us an incisive will—a will to cut, to wound the other. Bachelard would add (wisely yet again): "This kind of sadism acts under cover, beyond the reach of the *superego*" (p. 28, italics in original).

Now that I have sufficiently triggered the reader's imagination about the richness of intercultural psychoanalysis, allow me to explore this theme systematically with you.

## EVOKING HUSSERL AND BACHELARD

Let us turn to the first patient quoted above, a British psychotic anorexic who feared that her African clinician would eat her up. We could say that her own cannibalistic greed had gotten the bet-

ter of her precisely *because* she was anorexic. This way of viewing experience as driven by the causal context of nature compelled Husserl (1997) to coin the term *naïve psychologism*. In this respect, as a native of Ghana, I am a cannibal because an anorexic who breaks down into psychosis can construct an African only as a black cannibal, one whose meaning is constructed by her using the imagery of darkness, the unknown, into which she can ascribe a sinister intentionality. We live in the same world, but she has chosen to intentionally situate herself as one who can be voraciously taken into an other's body as victuals, digestible food, which in turn could awaken murderous phantoms that dwell inside her. Her life is in peril. She has closed off all possibilities that I could be helpful to her, a good guest inside her body, as it were.

Suppose, then, that we try to transcend this naïve psychologism, that mode of experiencing that is grounded in the causal and biological context of nature. Suppose that we view our white psychotic's way of situating herself in front of a dark-skinned clinician as based on previous sedimentations of darkness perceived as unknown and dangerous. These sedimentations are *transcendental* for Husserl (1997) because they are distributed over all aspects of our life-world: economic ("it was a dark day on Wall Street today"), historical, political, social, and so on. Here there are oscillations between passive and active generation. There is a doubling of associative links, so that anything actively created and subjectively constituted by my patient depends on previous sedimentations of life experiences that now lay passively dormant in her consciousness and mine. Such sedimentations of prior acts of construction have traditionally been considered unsuitable for psychological inquiry; rather, they have been seen as belonging to the realm of philosophy.

There is another possibility to consider if we wish to conduct a psychological investigation of how our patient views blackness, eating voraciously, and so on. We may consider that: (1) There are *sedimentations* of history; (2) These sedimentations are *reactivated* in the transference in ways that suggest an oscillation between

active and passive generation; and (3) *Intentionality* is inscribed as a part of that reactivation.

Thus, we have a three-tier ascension from sedimentation to reactivation to intentionality. We are now in the realm of psychoanalysis. In this clinical sphere, the following points hold true:

- for every *event* of history, there is a *sense* of history;
- for every physical materiality, there is a functional correlate;
- for every physical presentation, there is a psychical representation.

Therefore, we must seek commonalities between antinomies of:

- inside–outside
- essences–accidents
- reality–appearance
- center–structure
- natural–cultural
- centrifugal–centripetal
- intrinsic nature–ostensible nature
- meaning–significance
- mind–world

Bachelard (1939) offers further food for thought:

Literary symbolism and the symbolism that is Freud's, such as they are executed in classical symbolism and normal dreamwork, are only mutilated examples of the symbolizing powers active in nature. Both present an expression that has been arrested too soon. They remain substitutes for a substance or person that deserts evolution, *syntheses named too quickly, desires uttered too soon*. A new poetry and a new *psychology* that might describe the soul as it is being formed, language in bloom, *must give up definite symbols or images learned merely and return to vital impulses and primitive poetry*. [p. 31, italics added]

In this respect, then, the concrete/syncretic and the symbolic are continuous. The syncretic can ascend into the domain of the

symbolic, and, likewise, the symbolic can descend into the syncretic. What does it mean for me, then, that I am an analyst with a dark skin? The phenomenological element that I carry into intercultural analysis is that, in presiding over an intrapsychic story, I may have a huge advantage as a dark person over others who have to search for the transference. I do not have to look very far for what transference I am being invited to take on when I appear in a patient's dream as an untrustworthy Japanese restaurant owner who uses his restaurant to make families come together. And the transference is ever so transparent when I am an unexpectedly kind, Nigerian army general; or when Mount Kenya is erupting with volcanic fire in a patient's dream after an acrimonious session. In the dark, one cannot see. One may be harmed. When my patients enter these dark, epistemic places, their safety is perceived to be at stake, and an ever-so-fortuitous negative transference is evoked. In such primal places, anything that has integrity is a provocation and must be dismantled by the dreamer. I must be ready to absorb, house, and transform the project behind the negative transference in order to advance the analysis.

Such a story follows in this clinical vignette.

## A CLINICAL STORY

A French physician comes to see me for psychoanalysis for her suicidal impulses. In the past, she prematurely terminated a Lacanian analysis and two Freudian analyses on both sides of the Atlantic. With a determined disposition, she warns me that I may be the next analyst she fires. With scorn, she discovers that I come from Ghana, West Africa. With cynicism, she tells me her suspicion that I may be like those French analysts who are "all words." She had already Googled me to learn that I had written about French and German phenomenologists, notably Merleau-Ponty and Husserl.

The differences between us are palpable. She is light-skinned; I am very dark-skinned. She has seen the violence of poverty;

economically, I have been relatively fortunate. She practically reeks with pain; I carry with me a naive, preambivalent mythology that the world is a basically good place. She is full of hate; I dream of fresh starts in the face of adversity.

Analysis begins with the patient's statement that "I don't want to be here and I want to speak in French."<sup>1</sup>

### *Sedimentation*

The patient talks about "a huge sadness around a big thing." She wants to *eject* her uncooperative young adult children out of her life; she would like them to disappear. She feels like she is in a prison, and she feels empty. In her mind, she tells me, there is a place like a cave to which she retreats when she is in distress. That cave feels like a home.

I will let her speak for herself:

It's comfortable, I feel safe there, and it's fuzzy. It's like a *uterus* and I can see outside. It tilts deep into the diaphragm. It takes a lot of work to see outside and be inside. *It's at the back; there is a tension between staying inside and outside.* I feel the *tension at the root of the diaphragm.* Then I have this other vision. It's a quick vision of a monster—a *tortured vision of a monster trying to push things out of this cave.*<sup>2</sup>

There is a related dream:

I was in a maniac (sic) mood, visiting the past—people and places in the past. I was in a cellar. I told myself: "I am glad I am not paying the bills for this cellar because the water is not draining out." There was a floor in the cellar: It was pre-cement, reverse pillars (sic). In the place where you could have put a pillar, the pillar was not there, and the draining was not happening. So I poked a

<sup>1</sup> Except in three instances, I have translated the patient's words into English for this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Use of italic type in the patient's comments represents my emphasis rather than hers.



stick in there. An old structure was blocking the pathway of this water. (She laughs out loud.) And I do remember, I wasn't paying the bill for this place! And I met this woman that I used to know in Belgium. When I hugged her, I felt her spine. She said, "Ugh!" She was so skinny; I could even palpate the front of the vertebrae. *It was deep in the diaphragm.* I could feel the elasticity, but it wasn't flexible enough. I decided to separate the two vertebrae. "Bloh!"—and it was fixed!

In her associations, the patient wonders if the space between the anus and the vagina, the space that tilts deep into the diaphragm, is the cloaca, and decides it is so. The cloaca is the pre-mammalian organ for excreting digestive, reproductive, and urethral waste matter, she notes. Then she speaks about an old castle that has a round cave with the shape of two eggs touching each other. "Oh, I forgot something majorly [sic]!" she interjects. "When I was going down into the cellar in the dream, there was a bunch of people. There was a young woman like my daughter; and an old woman—a dangerous witch—was there."

I summarize this material to the patient as follows:

You have a world. It has inhabitants: a maternal figure—call her a witch—who withholds food; a starved person, whose body structure must be fixed; and a daughter who must beware. And you are the person who fixes the starved woman.

The patient elaborates with an old dream that dates back to when her daughter was a baby:

There was a huge river with a strong current. My daughter had fallen into the water. She was fighting to survive. And so I was telling her, "You can do it! You can do it!" A big woman, a feminine version of Darth Vader—she had a face but not a mask, said: "No, you are not going to do what your mother said. There is a right way to do it [i.e., to come out of water with strong currents]." It was a breakthrough when I realized that all three people

were me. The big authoritative woman had become a witch. That doesn't scare me any more.

This, then, is a sedimented structure of the patient's experience:

1. There is a place to return to when one is in distress.
2. This place, a cave, is safe, comfortable, and fuzzy.
3. However, it feels like prison.
4. In such a habitus, no feeding takes place; the inhabitants are emaciated, even anorexic.
5. The inhabitants must beware.
6. The witch matriarch owns the cellar.
7. She establishes the way one swims against stormy currents.
8. Since the pillars are out of their places and imperfect structures block the draining of water, she, the witch, must pay the bill.
9. The witch owns the body that houses the contents of this habitus.
10. The cloaca—the place of discharge for the intestinal, reproductive, and urinary functions—is not a place where feeding takes place; hence, it has an emaciated inhabitant.

### *Reactivation*

Not long afterward, I learned that the patient worked tirelessly at riding and training twelve horses every day. At the end of one very difficult session with her, as I noticed a very bad taste in my mouth, the longer epigraph of T. S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" (1922) suddenly came to me: "For with my own eyes I saw Sybil sitting in a vessel reading her rune; and when the boys asked

her, 'Sybil, what do you want?' She answered: 'I want to die'" (p. 27). In fact, no interpretation could mitigate the patient's self-erasure, until an event that occurred later on: a horse fell on top of her, and "I almost died," in her words. She had broken her pelvis, causing her to miss two weeks of analysis. Upon her return, she said that the following words of mine had "sustained" her: "You must not allow yourself to be ambushed."

The patient gradually worked her way in subsequent dream-work out of the cave. At the end of the first year, she brought me a gift: *the seeds of a castor oil plant*. Noticing the next day that her gift was still on my desk and still the subject of analysis, she said, rather casually:

By the way, if you decide to take the plant seed home, be careful where you plant it. I don't know if there are children in your house. You must not touch the seeds. It can be a poisonous plant, even though it can grow richly.

In short, it could kill me, my children, or their children if any one of us were to touch the seed.

Now an irresistible quotation from Virgil comes to mind: "Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes." As many will know, it translates as: "I fear the Greeks even when they bring gifts." Our suicidal patient had thus turned assassin. Someone must die. If it were not to be her, it must be me and/or my offspring.

At the beginning of the second year of treatment, we could hear the patient's imagined transformations: Nazi executioners must give up their dark fabrics in favor of Majorcan and colorful African fabrics. She was interested in building models and doing craft work. Structures that she built must have light entering into the interior.

These transformations continued until we hit another difficult patch in our work together, one that lasted nine months. She would set up situations that would cause her to be out of analysis for long periods, and then return and berate me for not being available enough. Or, she would be late by as much as twenty-five minutes, and then come in to tell me that she had driven ninety

miles an hour to get there: "I felt feisty behind the wheel" (said while lying on the couch, throwing her four limbs outward as though she wanted to break out of an enclosed space). Her biggest grievance was that I was either arrogant or uncertain of myself, and so I should seek the help of a clinical supervisor: "After all, all analysts need to have supervisors."

### *Intentionality*

I have discussed sedimentations of historical events (or grievances), as well as reactivation of that which is sedimented. Now a third tier is needed to show that what is reactivated has intentionality: That is, into this third tier is inscribed the motivated behavior—the intentionality—behind what has been reactivated in the transference, in order to serve new and contemporary purposes.

Let us turn now to two sessions at the very beginning of the third year of this patient's analysis.

### *Pivotal Session I*

She: I feel like breaking away from you.

I: In the same precarious way that you broke away from your previous analysts?

She: I thought about that! (There is a pause, and then she speaks somberly, in the grammar of a child.) I go away because I am scared. *I am scared of being crushed by you.*

I: Scared of being crushed by the figure of an incompetent mother/analyst who cannot keep dates straight and be there for you?

She: No-o-o-o, I don't think it's that. I just think there is something in your tone of voice that tells me you are not very happy with my lateness. You know, I never thought about this; my father was like that.

He was always rushing around; always in a rush. But it's not about time so much. In his case, it's about squeezing, not having a place to live.

I: Please continue.

She: When he was twenty-five or so, my father was practically squeezed out of his place by his parents. He decided to move out of his father's home because it was untenable for his mother. (pause)

I: (I feel uneasy and unsettled about the disconnected tie between us. I want to explore it, emphasizing the affective side of the relationship.) You are afraid of my crushing you. In addition, someone is being squeezed out of place, and you feel the pressure to break away from me. In an uncanny sort of way, your language tells me that you want to abort the analysis and feel under pressure to do so.

She: Maybe my dream will tell us something.

Here is the patient's dream:

I was in a car, an old Volvo. I was between two vineyards. The car was going, but not with a whole lot of power. There was a mudslide. The mud was falling on the car like an ocean. I woke up in a panic.

And here are her associations to the dream:

Spencer's son, my stepson, also called Spencer, made a movie about rape. I sent him back a message saying I had been *écoeurée* by his film. I didn't have to use that word. It means "disgusted," but I wanted also to say that my heart had been pulled out. I was *jabbing*. I didn't need to do this.

I: Perhaps. At another level, could you have been *remembering* something?

- She: I know, I know. An *acte de manqué*, at some level.
- I: You responded to the movie as if you had been raped by having to watch it.
- She: Yes, but now I remember. He had signed the movie *Spencer X*, like it was for his father. The first movie he made was for his mother.
- I: Would you feel able to tell me what you saw in the movie?
- She: It was very disgusting. It took place in an underground garage. A woman is getting inside her car. And at first a man innocuously comes to ask her something. The menace builds up, and then he rapes her. The worst part of it was that she tried to defend herself, and she could not! It gave me this feeling of impotence just to see this disgustingly ugly man rape her.
- I: Earlier in this session, a person is scared of being crushed by another: you—by me. Someone is squeezed out of his home: your father. A person is scared. A person is disgusted and her heart is being pulled out; she is jabbing. And rape, an aggressive sexual act, takes place. Now we hear about a mudslide that threatens to kill the occupants of a Volvo. What do you know about the circumstances of your birth?
- She: I know that I was born with the umbilical cord wrapped around my neck three times. *I know that it was emotionally a big challenge.* I was born on November 19; it is harvest time. You sow also. I was the first to be born of my parents' marriage, and my paternal grandmother thought it was ridiculous to be born in hospital. Those days, in the early '50s, it took one and a half hours to get

there. And after all that ordeal, they left my mother there alone in hospital. My grandmother didn't stay. On Sundays, she came to visit. *They* left my mother because they said they had work to do. (The patient cries profusely.) The midwife consoled my mother. So that's what I know about my birth. I was born by forceps.

I: Kicking your way out of the vulva in a mudslide, in an "ocean" of blood. Kicking and jabbing to be let out as your mother tried to squeeze you out of the birth canal, trying to free yourself from the cord that tied you to your mother.

She: Oh, yeah—I was blue.

I: This African midwife, so to speak, has news for you: you have already survived, even though, from time to time, I see you kicking and making fists on the couch when you are feeling feisty about something.

She: Good, yeah, good. I survived, and I did better with my children. Except my son had the cord around his neck, too. And there's a part of him that is not alive. (pause) You are away in November and I am away for six weeks after you come back. (Fretting over my having gone away some nine months ago, she asks me if I would let her know all the times in the coming year that I will be away. I let her know then that I will be away for an extensive time: three weeks in November. A month earlier, she informed me that she could not arrange a series of family meetings overseas to coincide with my time away.) *I don't know what I am going to do without you.* (She pauses. There will be time to analyze this willful resistance on her part, but this is not the time; this is a time for ac-

curate empathy, genuineness, and even nonpossessive warmth—not the time for an interpretation that might be perceived as punitive. She speaks again, chuckling.) The *Volvo* sounds like the *vulva*, doesn't it?

I: And the pathway between the two vineyards is like the birth canal, with an ocean of blood/mudslides blocking your way out of it.

She: That pathway between the two vineyards was a very familiar sight of my growing up. I did a lot of work in these spaces that are sort of wasted, because—if you think of it just from the economic point of view—you make a road, and you have room only for a tractor to come through. (pause) Thank you for your *bienveillance* (that is, for my being awake while she slept).

I: It is also for me to thank *you*, for trusting me with the story of your birth.

### *Discussion*

There is a great deal to be understood here. The patient wants me to get a supervisor to oversee her analysis. Her mother was left alone, “unsupervised,” as she tried to give birth to her daughter. The patient wanted me to be supervised as she prepared to tell me the story of her birth, so that I could preside over the rebirth more competently. And in reactivating the sedimentations of history, she went one step further: “Do not leave me like my grandmother did.”

This patient set out to force me to abort her analysis. She provoked me in every way she knew—and she knew it. She would come in very late after speeding on the highway, having risked her life and others', claiming she enjoyed the “feistiness” involved in careening past other drivers. As she provoked me, I stood still. At times, I felt very competent to deliver her. At other times,



I felt I was not doing my best work; now I can surmise what my uneasiness was about.

I was like a mother who in the patient's eyes was incompetent to deliver her. What would this "delivery" mean: A physical delivery from her mother? A psychical delivery? When I said to her that I had news for her, to the effect that she had already been safely delivered, it was a way of letting her know ahead of time that this was not the end of the story. *The fight to break out of the vaginal canal served the purpose of survival. Now that fight had taken on a secondary autonomy, so that she was fighting to live even when there was no need to fight.* As a result, I expected her to fight me now and then, again and again, until she found new and creative adaptations that bespoke her psychological birth, permitting her to develop with greater integration. Witness her phrase: "I feel split most of the time. I am one person here. The light is on one part of me; one part cannot be with the other."

### *Pivotal Session 2*

Just before the next session I will describe, I was at a meeting in London for two weekdays and a weekend. Upon my return, I had canceled another two weekdays in order to be in New York for a case presentation. Altogether, I had canceled four of the patient's sessions. She had erroneously come to her first canceled session on the previous Thursday.

She: I came on a day that I should not have come. I knew you were not here. *No*—I had forgotten you were not here. I was really anxious. I felt guilty. Maybe I did something.

I: As if it were your fault that the umbilical cord was wrapped around your neck three times—feeling guilty, as if you had decided how you were to be born.

She: (grunts) Ugh. I see that in my daughter Sandra. She has the same thing. A little shit happens and she feels guilty.

- I: You had been trying to tell me the story of your birth: your mother's difficult experience in giving birth to you for some time. Trying to make me feel as uncertain as she felt. It took time to tell the full story, but you did it.
- She: (defensively, as if I had attacked her) But I take a lot of time to do things.
- I: Progress now becomes learning how you can be generative without wrapping a cord around your own neck, *by your own hand*.
- She: Well, I have to tell you something. In the dream where I was in this mud . . .
- I: Coming at you like an ocean?
- She: Yeah, your interpretation was absolutely perfect. It was the first time that I felt I didn't have to oppose or resist an interpretation. As much as you feel I doubted your capacity, you must know that I felt that way, that you were on the mark.
- I: I passed the test that three previous analysts failed, causing you to fire them.
- She: (She is very amused. She is energized.) No-o-o. Not three. Four! I told the last one that he looked like Hitler. I was terrible to him because he was Jewish. So now let's talk about the difference between you and them. With the French guy, it was all words. Another one accused me of barging in to someone's session when I had been waiting for thirty minutes for him. The Jewish guy who looked like Hitler, I already told you about; and with Dr. X, nothing happened, so I left.
- I: I am all ears. Please continue.
- She: Two things are on my mind now. I had the thought that *Narcissus* . . . I know the concept . . . I know

the story but I can never remember his name without asking you for it. It came to me for the first time without asking for your help to remember his name. *Each time I try to remember this guy's name, I am gasping for air.* I know that that is what I have been grappling with for weeks! I don't think there is a more central issue than this one: my narcissism. Now that makes me anxious that we won't meet for November, December, and part of January.

I: I understand your fear as follows: that while I am away, you could die. Nine months ago, you asked me to tell you when I was going to be away during the whole year. I gave you the information because you wanted to be sure we were both away at the same time on most occasions. And then you proceeded to set things up so that the analysis as a place of psychological birth would be attacked. Nine months ago.

She: Really!! (Her voice is excited.)

I: Yes.

She: That is uncanny. (long pause) I look forward to seeing my parents in Belgium in December. (long pause) *When I start to talk about Narcissus, it's a topic where I feel at the edge.* You are the analyst. *You as the mother giving birth to a new person.* Would it be possible? I don't know how to do it.

I: When you talk about Narcissus, it is your way of saying that you were at the edge of life and death with an incompetent mother: me as the figure who represents your mother in labor, and me as the person, the analyst, who needs supervision.

She: (fiercely) I still think that all analysts should have supervision, but I see your point.

I: Allow me to stay at the level of the unconscious so that we can together grasp what you have been telling me these past nine months: you needed me to act incompetently; you pushed me hard to not feel like an expert, to have the feeling of being an imposter that a young mother has. But, with the help of your dreams and the analysis, we managed to avoid a stillbirth.

She: I know now. I almost did it again. I almost wrecked another analysis. But I don't think I would have. I am tired.

I: You can rest. I will be here.

She: In a way, I feel like a speck of something. I feel like I am now a huge, furry animal. (laughs out loud) One day, I had a dream. I had it when I came to Colorado, back in 1979. And this dream has stayed with me very, very vividly: a furry animal crossed my path. I was walking in a forest. The forest was moving with its body and with the air. I felt like it was *a sense of* my mother and also *the reality of the forest*. It was very, very real.

I: It had an impact on you.

She: I don't even know why I am telling you. I felt like I was in pieces, in an unclear way.

I: Perhaps it felt like the way a newborn child might feel. Psychologically, you are not sure whether you are whole or in pieces, a whole child or a furry animal, boy or girl, dead or alive, asleep or awake, carried in the air by your mother or of your own free will.

She: Yeah! Yeah! (pause) I want to start painting again. Yesterday I went to a room that I want to renovate

for my painting. I felt shitty. But I spent three hours listening to Yo-Yo Ma. I love the cello. And it was really good. It felt good to be in that space, to be alone in there. I did a collage just to have a sense of the work I'd be doing there. It was a great complement to the work I am doing here. (pause) You know my thing of *cleaning out*, cleaning out everything? I did a barn sale. It was the farm manager's idea. We work well now; I work with him quite well now. We had a sale on Saturday. We had a lot of fun. We didn't sell much.

I: But I hear satisfaction in your voice that *the cleaning out was good*.

She: And the funny thing was that, on Sunday, my husband came to say, "I want you to keep this and that." It was just like him—deciding to get rid of something and then asking to keep it.

## CONCLUSION

The concrete is a necessary starting point. It is a potential starting point for a clinical story, one that necessarily takes the *events of history* and transforms them into a *sense of history*. In such an appropriation of history, the cloacal function is a concrete expression of getting rid of waste matter from the digestive, reproductive, and urinary tracts in the premammalian world. In the sedimentations of this patient's historical grievances, she is able to invoke cloacal imagery to clean out her wounds, as a starting point. When these sedimentations enter into the transference, one of us must be ejected. One of us must die, but somehow we both survive. As a result, I am invited to become a delegate for an incompetent mother, who in turn must be supervised to carry out her psychological birth.

The three-tiered notion of sedimentation, reactivation, and the intentional dimension provides us with a heuristic model for

presiding over an intrapsychic story in psychoanalysis, interracial or otherwise. The transference and its use of concrete/syncretic imagery is but one distinguishing element in interracial analyses. The dark is a real place in the world in which we all live. It shows up at night. It also has a personal meaning for each of us. Under regression, we enter into a place where that which is different and has integrity is a provocation. Predator anxiety can be evoked. It can take on an extra bite: a metaphor for some of us, an extrojection of cannibalistic impulses for our regressed patients.

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## JOSEPHINE BAKER: PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE COLONIAL FETISH

BY ANNE ANLIN CHENG, PH.D.

*This paper traces an intricate path connecting racial fantasy, aesthetic judgment, and the larger cultural problem of intersubjective recognition. In particular, the author examines the theme of fetishism, both sexual and racial, in a Western historical, colonial context, in order to unravel a set of disturbances that cohere around the racial fetish then and now. Taking the figure of an entertainment icon of the 1920s, Josephine Baker, as a case study, the author shows how the imagination of the colonizing white male was both articulated and disrupted by Baker as a ready-made representation of the cultural, racial, and sexual other.*

Social subjects . . . distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classification is expressed or betrayed . . . . Art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimizing social differences.

—Pierre Bourdieu [1984, p. 6]

It's getting darker and darker in Paris.

—Josephine Baker [quoted in K. C. C. Dalton  
and H. L. Gates 1998, p. 904]

## JUDGING BEAUTY, JUDGING RACE

Aesthetic judgment has shown itself to be a fundamental category of social difference. Not only does the ability to exercise aesthetic

judgment—what is beautiful and what is ugly—instantiate personal taste, but it can also constitute the very possibility of larger categories of cultural hierarchy, such as class (as suggested by Bourdieu in the quotation at the beginning of this article), national, and racial distinctions. Many scholars have demonstrated the historical complicity between the philosophical discourse of aesthetic judgment and a metaphysics of racial difference that has occurred since the Enlightenment (see, among others, Armstrong 1996; Eze 1997; Gates, unpublished; Gilman 1985; and Gilroy 1993).

Indeed, aesthetic categories have never been free from political implications, even if they often speak in a language of cultivated purity. Contemporary assessment of this imbricated relationship between aesthetics and politics has been relatively straightforward. Today's democratic and supposedly progressive culture mostly decries aesthetic judgment as an elitist and unfair exercise. Especially when it comes to the beauty of a person (as opposed to, say, of a flower or a painting), aesthetic judgments have been seen as deeply pernicious. Feminists have long documented beauty ideals' coercive and harmful effects on women. Much has been done to underscore beauty's unearned privileges, its excluding effects, and its complicity in patriarchal society's fundamental distaste for (or fear of) femininity. Beauty in racial politics bears equally negative inflections. Scholars in race studies, for instance, have demonstrated the detrimental effects that Eurocentric aesthetic judgment has had on men and women of color.

In short, the admiration of human beauty is mostly thought of as a shallow preference at best and unthinkably objectifying at worst, especially at the site of cross-racial encounters. Indeed, it is almost commonplace today to point out that notions of corporeal beauty at the intersection of race and gender represent insidious sites of patriarchal and hegemonic control. The critical discourse surrounding aesthetic judgment and the aesthetic object, as briefly outlined above, is at once self-evident and deficient. While common sense and scholarship conjoin to tell us that racism and sexism go hand in hand, generating parallel or doubling discriminatory effects, the matter is not as simple as this indictment suggests.



These complications manifest themselves most conspicuously around the figure of the so-called woman of color, who stands as one of the most historically objectified persons from European colonial history to mainstream culture today. As a victim of double discrimination, the woman of color would seem to exemplify the collaboration of sexism and racism. As a result, aesthetic judgment surrounding the racialized woman almost always poses a liability.

Historically, philosophically, and pragmatically, however, the intersection of racism and misogyny has produced contradictory meanings for the woman of color and her relationship to beauty. Because of the history of racialist inflections in aesthetic discourse and the Manichean differentiation between white and nonwhite women, the woman of color's relationship to beauty does *not* merely replicate the white woman's relationship to beauty, even if we were to understand beauty as a discourse of abjection for all women. In between a feminist critique of feminine beauty and a racial denial of nonwhite beauty, where might the woman of color be located? Does assenting to the prospect of a "beautiful woman of color" disrupt sexist and racist stereotypes, or merely repeat them?

Our efforts today at more liberal and "democratic" modes of recognitions (for instance, saying that there are, after all, *all kinds* of beauty) merely dilute the problem and serve to replace the objects of value without really addressing the logic of value and valuation subtending the beauty question. Moreover, the cure for racism and sexism seems often to be procured via the prolongation of one or the other.

The truth is that the beauty of (feminized and racialized) persons, either in representation or in real life, has been radically undertheorized, precisely because its existence has always provoked more criticism and attempts at demystification than it has critical analysis. If anything, the theoretical inquiry into the beauty of persons may not be less, but more, relevant than it has ever been before. Indeed, our unease about our reactions to beauty raises larger questions about what it means to see, perceive, and recog-

nize someone, socially and politically. The anthropological problem of how we encounter and engage the unknown other, evoked by European colonial expansion as early as the sixteenth century, remains a critical one for us today in the challenges of multiculturalism.

If blatant racist representations are thought to take the forms of ritualized stereotypes of people of color, it is also true that recuperative racial affirmation can often also operate along a similarly fetishistic logic, except perhaps positively inflected: for example, *we are not really like \*that\*, we are really like \*this\**. Thus, affirmation ends up skirting the edges of fetishization. This problem of recognition at the site of difference—what is prurience versus attention; what is reification versus acknowledgment, and so on—continues to haunt contemporary efforts to align the interests of progressive politics and the realities of multiculturalism in the courtroom, the boardroom, the classroom, and the consulting room.

I suggest that the distinction between beauty and ugliness at the intersection of race and gender remains a vexing problem not because of its tenacity in spite of consistent moral disapprovals directed against it, but because, counterintuitively, it contains a crisis of distinction—a crisis of difference that in fact confounds both moral and political judgments, evoking an ethical predicament surrounding the politics of beauty and recognition. What does it mean to recognize and treat someone (or oneself) through the lens of racial difference—be it in enthrallment or aversion? What does it mean to recognize difference in the first place? If reification and objectification are the dangers of paying too lavish an attention to difference, then we are reminded that we who imagine ourselves as liberal agents have yet to escape the domain of the fetish.

## REVISITING THE FETISH

The *fetish* poses a particularly intriguing—and vexing—springboard for tracking the problems of (political, cultural, and social) recognition. The term itself embodies a long, entangled history in the

development of anthropology, economic theory, psychoanalysis, and, lastly, contemporary cultural studies. In current usage, the term can denote either highly specialized or generally vernacular meanings in cultural, sexual, and racial contexts. To understand what the *racial fetish* is today, we have to understand the genealogy of the word, which itself reveals the complicity between a history of Western ideas and a history of conquest.

Anthropologist William Pietz (1985) traces the origin of the word *fetish* to the cross-cultural space of the coast of West Africa during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to the time and place of initial contact between Portuguese traders and “natives” of the Gold Coast. Initially used as a description of certain objects deployed in tribal rituals, the word *fetish* (which has etymological roots in Portuguese) quickly came to connote an issue of *value* in the constant themes of transaction on the Guinea coast between early European travelers and indigenous peoples. The fetish—as a symbol of how a very different culture assigns social value to material objects—became, for the European imagination, a quintessential sign of African otherness and “irrationality.” European traders would, for example, frequently remark on the trinkets and trifles that they managed to give in exchange for native possessions that the traders perceived as having real value. They both took advantage of and derided the indigenous people’s supposed ignorance.

The reincarnation of the term in today’s notion of a *racial fetish* and *racial fetishization* is, therefore, highly fraught. Although vernacular and some segments of liberal political cultures may easily throw around the term *racial fetishization*, usually in a form of pious disdain, the truth is that we have yet to grasp the profound problem of cross-cultural recognition embedded in the concept of fetishization, as suggested by the genealogy of the term. As I will elaborate in what follows, fetishism poses much more than a problem of falsely projected values; it itself embodies the very crisis of valuation in the first place—a predicament of distinction in the face of cultural, racial, and sexual differences.

*Sexual and Racial Fetishism*

As noted, the racial fetish as a term enjoys a wide cultural currency. It is almost always negatively inflected, denoting the focalization of attention, be it in the language of denigration or of desire, of another human being based solely on his or her racial identity and appearance. This is thought to have, in turn, an objectifying effect on that person. But what is this concept's relationship to its psychoanalytic roots? For Freud, fetishism expresses, of course, a sexual, not racial, problem. Freudian fetishism, very simply put, denotes a process of covering over sexual difference and, specifically, female lack. A man in the face of a woman's horrifying lack, Freud tells us, will cover over that lack with a projected, phallicized object.

Thus, the Freudian object of fetishism—that is to say, the woman—is at once partialized, phallicized, and marked as a *lack* by this imaginary structure of compensation. Racial fetishism would seem to borrow from the Freudian formulation in the loose sense of taking a part for the whole and thereby reducing someone to the confines of his or her racial identity. But as postcolonial critic Homi Bhabha (1994) points out, there are more profound structural and functional justifications for thinking about racial stereotypes as specifically a form of fetishism:

Fetishism, as the disavowal of difference, is that repetitious scene around the problem of castration. The recognition of sexual difference . . . is disavowed by the fixation on an object that masks that difference and restores an original presence. The *functional* link between the fixation of the fetish and the stereotype (or the stereotype as fetish) is even more relevant. For fetishism is always a “play” or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity—in Freud's terms: “All men have penises”; in ours, “All men have the same skin/race/culture”—and the anxiety associated with lack and difference—again, for Freud, “Some do not have penises”; for us, “Some do not have the same skin/race/culture.” [pp. 74-75, italics in original]

According to Bhabha, beyond the structural analogy, there is a functional advantage to framing racial stereotypes in terms of fetishism. As the passage above implies, it is the entwined nature of projection and compensation that psychically fuels skewed racial perceptions. Consequently, the stereotype—or the racial fetish—enables the production of an identity that is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and difference, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and the disavowal of it.

Bhabha then utilizes this connection between Freudian fetishism and colonial stereotyping in order to foreground the instability within both psychic systems. He writes:

This conflict of pleasure/unpleasure, mastery/defense, knowledge/disavowal, absence/presence, has a fundamental significance for colonial discourse. For the scene of fetishism is also the scene of the reactivation and repetition of primal fantasy . . . . The stereotype . . . as the primary point of subjectification in colonial discourse, for both the colonizer and the colonized, is the scene of . . . the desire for an originality which is . . . threatened by the differences of race, colour, and culture. [1994, p. 75]

In mapping out an analogy between sexual and racial fetishism, Bhabha highlights the anxiety haunting the apparent gestures of mastery and certitude behind every production and assertion of the stereotype, an insight that later proves central to his extended critique of colonial authority.

At the same time, there are several unresolved remainders left by this equation between racial and sexual fetish. First, if sexual fetishism (infamously quarantined by Freud as specifically a male pathology) compensates for and manages the fear of female lack through the specter of a displaced phallus, how exactly does that translate into racial terms? What would the racial analog be for a displaced phallus, and would not the gender of the racialized/fetishized object complicate matters? The psychical procedures for fetishizing a black woman versus a black man would surely share some but not all similar mechanisms, just as the gender of

the fetishistic viewing subject would make a difference. After all, racial fetishism is not confined to the white man, even if he is often cited as the culprit.<sup>1</sup> In addition, what does it mean to compensate fetishistically for racial lack when racial lack would seem to be what the stereotype/racial fetish insistently rehearses?

In other words, sexual fetishism, to the extent that it is ever successful, relies on the disavowal and covering over, however tenuous, of difference itself. Yet if there is something we know about the operations of racism through stereotyping, it is that the latter aims to highlight rather than disavow difference. The mapping of the sexual onto the racial, therefore, while productive in many ways, can also divert our attention away from the uneven and conflicted intersection of race and gender.

My point here is not to be a literalist about the applicability of sexual fetishism beyond its original parameter as established by Freud. Instead, I see the structural disparities between racial and sexual fetishism as highly informative in unpacking the assumptions behind the deployment of fetishism as a cultural category. It is precisely the pieces that do not fit that teach us something about the complex encounter between sexuality and race, a complexity that liberal piety can elide.

When we turn to Freud's (1927) work on fetishism, we find there already a built-in host of unresolved questions. For Freud, fetishism represents a pathology that is highly functional, as indeed pathologies can often be; specifically, Freudian fetishism functions for heterosexual men as a kind of psychical lubricant in the face of castration anxiety by making the supposed horror of female castration bearable. Fetishism may thus be said to offer a kind of guarantee for the fulfillment of normative, male desire. While the phallocentrism of Freud's premise cannot be denied, this psychic process also contrarily serves to do something quite unexpected, which is to de-naturalize masculine heterosexual desire. Not only does the fetish model presuppose a kind of psychic

<sup>1</sup> Think, for example, of the young white woman in Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), who found the anonymous narrator irresistible and "boootiful" in his blackness.

“overcoming,” necessary before a man can enjoy a woman, it also profoundly scrambles the signification of the phallus. Is the penis being replaced in a fetishistic projection a maternal or paternal phallus? Is fetishism about enjoying a woman-as-a-man or a man-as-a-woman? Either way, “normal” male heterosexuality begins to look like something other than a given. Indeed, fetishism as a defensive structure unleashes the very sexual uncertainty that it labors to cure.

Racial fetishism is no less stable in its theoretical construction. While the insight that fetishizing the black subject is meant to guarantee the safe distance and wholeness of the white subject makes theoretical sense, it nonetheless raises questions about how this transaction actually works. What is a “racial phallus”? And how does this “racial phallus” relate to white masculine anxiety about black male sexuality, as evidenced in the history of antimiscegenation and its very real accompanying history of lynching and violence? And, as noted, the black subject is not exactly being made *whole*, but rather is continued to be enjoyed as *lack*, and, similarly, the black female and male subject surely require different treatment, depending on the gender of the white viewer.

More intriguingly, what about the object of fetishism—that is, the black subject him-/herself? What is his/her relation to the fetishistic desire projected upon him/her, beyond that of either complicity or denial? How do we deal with the fact that the magic of fetishism has long seduced both the fetishist and his object? We have seen all too often minority subjects who perform the very stereotypical assignments that limit them—at times out of compliance, as the result of a process of internalization of the stereotype itself (or identification with it), and at times out of defiance, which we think of as subversion. But neither internalization nor subversion addresses the psychical, even identificatory, effects on the fetishized object. We have yet to confront the uncomfortable fact that the charismatic work of transforming abject identities into desired and “genuine” categories often resorts to reinvoking the fetish.

To replace a negative stereotype with a positive one has, of course, been a long-cherished liberal gesture, but the fetishistic

structure remains undisturbed, only inversely valued. Part of the limitation of much of the existing criticism of racial stereotypes is that they rely on the critique of the stereotype (as unreal, untrue, or inauthentic), without accounting for the dynamics of identification at work on both sides of the stereotype. Thus, while critical works such as Bhabha's (1994) have done much to dismantle the security behind white authority and its fantasy of originality and wholeness, there remains much that is unanswered, as well as more vexing questions about the colonized one's role in the dynamics of fetishistic desire.

Fetishism thus opens up, rather than sutures, a host of concerns about pleasure and recognition, about subjectivation not only for the master, but also for the slave. The theoretical instability in Freudian fetishism will prove to be crucial in understanding racial fetishism, an instability that may hold the key to reevaluating the politics surrounding the challenge of what it means to *see* one's self and another person. How indeed does one begin to get to know someone radically different from oneself? If the idea of genuine recognition is idealistic at best and bad faith at worst, how might we approach an ethic of recognition?

This question of an ethical recognition is a central challenge for reimagining clinical relationships. A fundamental interpersonal issue in the clinical situation, as Benjamin (1995) tries to address, is the status of the other/patient as the "object" of analysis. Benjamin builds on Winnicott's views in noting that "the mind works through both the relation to the other as an object of identification/projection and the relation to the other as an independent outside subject" (p. 6). Benjamin develops the notion of *like subjects* in order to encapsulate the double workings of recognition and identification on the part of the analyst in the clinical process:

When we recognize the outside other as a separate and equivalent center of subjectivity, she is a "like subject." When, on the other hand, we identify with the other as inner representation, taking the other as the ideal of who we might wish to become, we also set up a relation of "like subjects." [1995, p. 7]



Benjamin's proposal for a revision of the analyst–patient relation according to a “subject–subject” model is studied and enormously appealing.

There are, however, limitations to this “subject–subject” model. Aside from how this ideal might work pragmatically in a relationship that is structurally uneven and powered (as Dora's defiant response to Freud [1905] demonstrates), it also finally falls back on the good intentions, so to speak, of the analyst/viewing subject. But subjective intentions do not guarantee disinterested (in the Kantian sense) effects; nor is identification either always accessible by the subject him-/herself, or entirely simple when it comes to someone “wholly unlike” ourselves. This is especially apparent when it comes to the introduction of racial difference in the clinical setting. How does one introduce that difference without reifying—indeed, fetishizing—that difference? What does it mean to *identify with* the racial other in a professional and therapeutic relation? To what degree is disidentification crucial to identification?

These are not only clinical but also political problems. The answer to such difficult questions is obviously not to retreat to the universalism or essentialism of which psychoanalysis has been accused all too often, but neither is private, subjective awareness a wholly satisfying solution. Instead, we need to step back and reconsider altogether the *constitutive* role that fetishistic recognition plays in the very construction of difference.

Let us turn now to the emergence of an icon whose heatedly polemical legacy today signals the continuously vexing problem of what it means to see, to read, and to assess the spectacle of a racialized and sexualized body. I am thinking of a figure that straddles both colonial imagination and the birth of Western modernity: *la Joséphine*.

## LA JOSÉPHINE

In 1925, a young African American dancer named Josephine Baker and her act, *La Revue Nègre*, took Paris by storm. Baker's success in Paris epitomizes the infusion of African art and African American

music and dance into the French capital after World War I. Paris was apparently not only infatuated, but also identified with *la Joséphine*, as she was known, as an icon of its modernity.<sup>2</sup> As literary and cultural critics Karen C. C. Dalton and Henry Louis Gates (1998) sum it up, “Paris was infatuated with all things black” (p. 904).

Out of this European cultivation of black aesthetics, Baker emerged as one of the most popular and highest paid entertainers in theatrical history. Many of the enduring images for this frenzy for Baker and for “all things black” came from Paul Colin’s *Le Tumulte Noir* (1917), a portfolio of hand-colored lithographs issued in tribute to Baker and other African American performers who had captivated the Parisian public during *les années folles*—known in the United States as the Roaring Twenties. In *Le Tumulte noir*, we see:

Music-hall stars Mistinguette and Maurice Chevalier charleston frantically across the pages; a middle-aged woman dances until she drops like a limp cloth into an armchair, visions of an elegant black man she had seen earlier in a Montmartre nightclub dance in her head. The City of Light has fallen under the spell of black music and dance. [Dalton and Gates 1998, p. 903]

Josephine Baker herself famously and ironically observed:

When the rage was in New York of colored people, Monsieur Siegfried of Ziegfried Follies said it’s getting darker and darker on old Broadway. Since the La Revue Nagri [sic] came to Gai Parée, I’ll say it’s getting darker and darker in Paris. [Baker as quoted in Dalton and Gates 1998, p. 904]

The blackening of Paris poses an interesting conundrum. What does it say about European whiteness, and what does it say about

<sup>2</sup> Baker’s extraordinary success in the European continent was not limited to France alone. Germany also went through a phase of Bakermania, especially in Berlin, where the Weimar Republic was attempting to model itself as Europe’s most modern city, and to imagine itself as the wildest, most sexually excessive city in the European landscape. Thus, once again, we find Baker as the icon of intertwined modernity and primitive excess.

American blackness? And what is the connection between blackness and European modernity? While segregation was illegal in France (unlike in America at the time), France was not without its racial biases. After all, its colonial rule was predicated on the presumed superiority of the French, their language, and their culture over the peoples of their African and Caribbean possessions. So the “freedom” that Baker supposedly found in Paris carried its own racial and colonial qualifications.

Today, there are two critical views on this passion for things black in Europe during this period. One perspective attributes Baker’s success to her complicity with or victimization by the historical Western fetishization of the black female body.<sup>3</sup> An opposing perspective regards Baker’s European success as a positive critique of Jim Crow America.<sup>4</sup> In short, the story of Josephine Baker can be taken to represent either a tale of ongoing racial and gender prejudice, or a fable of political triumph.

Rather than privileging one or the other perspective, I am more interested in unraveling the set of cultural assumptions about race and gender that enable such contradictions to coexist. More importantly, I wish to focus on the ways in which the fetish as a negative stereotype can seem to morph so effortlessly into the *representative* as an affirmative icon. The fact that Baker can be seen as easily embodying the one or the other indexes the complex, intimate relationship between the two notions—a relationship that exceeds mere antimony. How is it that the performances of authenticity invariably reenact fetishization, and vice versa? The minority, marginalized subject is often only too willing to fetishize him-/herself, if it means recognition in the social arena. Thus,

<sup>3</sup> bell hooks (1992), for example, situates the French fascination with Baker’s nearly nude performances squarely within the tradition of earlier European representations and exploitations of black female sexuality.

<sup>4</sup> I will address those critics who aim to revalue and rescue Baker’s legacy in more detail in what follows, for, while the criticisms of Baker (along the lines of hooks’s argument, see footnote 3, above) are understandable and self-evident, it is the ways in which Baker is politically recuperated that demonstrate most notably the contradictions inhering in liberal gestures of affirmation, and that I find most intriguing for discussion here.

even as my mother, a Taiwanese immigrant, lamented the historical inaccuracy behind Bertolucci's 1987 film extravaganza, *The Last Emperor*, she was nonetheless relieved that "at least the Chinese looked beautiful in this movie." There is a deep pathos behind this mental act of self-consolation; it should tell us much about the entwined discourses of progress and discrimination.

### *Historical and Cultural Antecedents*

To begin to address the conflation of idealization and denigration that surrounds Baker and is invoked by her, it may be helpful to remind ourselves of the roles that primitivism and Orientalism played in the formation of European modernism. From Gauguin to Picasso, from Stein to Pound, modernism was abound with a seemingly insatiable desire for things primitive and exotic. Yet, as historians and critics have pointed out, the very notions of primitivism and exoticism really reveal less about African or Eastern cultures than they do about Western cultures themselves, and, specifically, Western cultural and political anxieties at the turn of the century. The end of the nineteenth century saw the culmination of four centuries of European expansion. By the 1890s, the British, French, and Germans had ransacked West Africa, leading to encounters with primitivism and with so-called primitive aesthetics.

Earlier, with the discovery of the New World in the fifteenth century and the many subsequent voyages of exploration around the globe, Europeans had begun to expand their cultural and geographic horizons. From the Age of Discovery through the mid-nineteenth century, explorers, missionaries, and amateur ethnographers compiled an immense record of life among these so-called primitive races, producing what was to become the beginnings of modern anthropology. In a very real way, we can say that the history of learning about non-European racial others for the West is also a history of collecting aesthetic objects.

In addition to written travel records and, later, photography, one of the most influential resources for disseminating information about the racial other came from a Western phenomenon that

started in the mid-nineteenth century: the World's Fair. These expositions, such as the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London in 1851 and the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1898, purported to display cosmopolitanism, but they were in fact very much a tool of European imperialism, wherein primitive (and colonized) peoples were exhibited. These events had profound influences on the European public imagination. It was after visiting the Exposition Universelle, for instance, that Gauguin "fell in love" with the idea of going to Oceania and started the active self-campaign that finally got him to Tahiti as a member of the colonial government.<sup>5</sup>

It was after visiting the same Exposition that Ravel composed his opera *The Boy and the Magic Word*, a version of the family romance replete with a host of racial metaphors about madness, "Negroes," and "the Chinese."<sup>6</sup> In America, it was at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair that the young T. S. Eliot first encountered the notions of Eastern philosophy that sowed the seeds of his ideas about world mythology, history, and modernity. Thus, World's Fairs have played a crucial role in the spectacularization of imperial and colonial fantasies about Africa and Asia. (They also, I might add, highlight the disturbing intimacy between racial rec-

<sup>5</sup> Gauguin presents a paradigmatic example of the highly mediated nature of the European passion for primitivism and Orientalism, because his attraction to Tahiti derived from his exposure to the imperial representations of Oceania as a sort of primitive paradise at the Exposition Universelle, as well as from his subsequent reading of French author Pierre Loti, who wrote about his own (much fantasized) exotic travels in Tahiti. For more on Gauguin's relationship to Oceania, see Perloff (1995).

<sup>6</sup> This Ravel piece will in turn come to play an unexpectedly foundational role in the development of psychoanalysis: Klein (1986) will later base her theories on infantile anxiety on a reading of the libretto of this very opera, basing her analysis on the opera's highly racialized imagery without ever acknowledging those racial elements. Subsequent rereadings of the Klein piece by Lacan (1954) and Jacobus (1998) substantially engage Kleinian theories of the imaginary and of infantile anxiety without addressing, or even noticing, the flagrant racial imagery of Klein's meditations. The "objects" of object relations thus turn out to embody highly racialized "bodies" and reveal the profoundly constitutive roles that primitivism and Orientalism have played in the history of psychoanalytic theory. For more on the submerged yet foundational presence of the racial imaginary in Klein's work, see Cheng (2001, pp. 75-76) and Walton (2001).

ognition and racial reification in the production of knowledge, a problem that I would suggest our contemporary and self-consciously liberal culture has yet to resolve. The other as object of analysis remains a politically fraught project.)

The passion for things and peoples “primitive” exploded in the early twentieth century in the art of Pablo Picasso, the writing of Gertrude Stein, and the infamy of Josephine Baker. From Gauguin to Picasso, from Ravel to Stein, Africa-as-mask, both literally and symbolically, became the veil through which Western modernists reinvented themselves (North 1995). The eruption of primitive passions thus does not merely coincide with, but in fact actively authorizes, the self-making of the moderns. The polarity between savagery and civility that was set up by historical Euro-American imperialism is not only an imaginary construct on the part of the West, but also speaks to profound anxieties in Western culture as it existed at the cusp of great cultural and geographical changes. As Gauguin wrote in letters to his brother, Tahiti promised to free him and to bring him rejuvenation. Gauguin’s conflation of *barbarism* with *rejuvenation* spells out exactly how the exotic and the primitive provided the screen onto which Europeans at the end of the *fin de siècle* projected desire, escape, and anxiety. Primitivism and Orientalism were not just historically synchronous to European Modernism; they were in fact part of the engine for the making of modernity.

Moreover, both as cultural fantasies and discourses, primitivism and Orientalism produce a rhetoric about the other that is characterized by ambivalence. The language of idealization (which, in this case, included rhetoric about the innocence, naturalness, beauty, and simplicity of the so-called native people) went hand in hand with the language of denigration (which saw native peoples as decadent, regressive, ignorant, and so on). These two seemingly contradictory veins of rhetoric converged most notably in the figure of the racialized woman, who came to embody both the epitome of sexuality and moral decay.

Historian Sander Gilman’s (1985) seminal work on Sarah Bartmann, known as the Venus Hottentot, for example, documents the historical European desire for, yet denigration of, black female

sexuality, and demonstrates how European modern art and literature, from Manet to Balzac, have configured white female moral corruption through tropes of blackness. Scientists of the nineteenth century poured over detailed studies of anatomical differences, especially racialized female genitalia, in order to justify theories of primitive backwardness. As film critic Elizabeth Coffman (1997) succinctly summarizes:

Bartmann's story does not just represent the horror of uncontained medical curiosity; it represented the horror of a crisis of empire. The black body becomes the fragmented site of a fetishistic economy—an economy that organizes the colonial imagination, an economy that makes the nation possible. [p. 383]

It is in this context that we have to consider the paradox presented by Josephine Baker. It seems clear that the Baker phenomenon offers a manifestation of European modernism's attempt to invigorate itself through primitive fantasies (Martin 1995; Nenno 1997). It is also apparent that the contradictory public reception of Baker, either wildly celebratory or bitterly critical, does not take place outside of, but rather partakes of, this historical ambivalence within the rhetoric of modernist primitivism. What is much harder to determine—and what interests me in relation to our focus on the political and psychoanalytic problem of the fetish—are the ways in which Baker as a performer availed herself of those fantasies.

### *Baker as Performer*

Baker was not just a black female performer; she was a performer who relentlessly enacted fantasies of black femininity. We might say that fetishism was the theme *and* the mode of her career. In the piece "The Chocolate Dandies," Baker revived the minstrel tradition, playing a ragamuffin in black face, bright cotton smocks, and clown shoes. Poet e. e. cummings recalled her performance in "The Chocolate Dandies" as a "tall, vital, incomparably fluid nightmare which crossed its eyes and warped its limbs in a purely unearthly manner" (Dalton and Gates 1998, p. 911). Baker repeat-

edly drew from the minstrel tradition, often entering the stage in black-face lips and wearing plaid dungarees, with knees bent, feet splayed part, buttocks thrust out, stomach sucked in, cheeks puffed out, eyes crossed. She has been described as part human and part animal: “shaking, shimmering, and writhing like a snake to the heat of jungle music” (Dalton and Gates 1998, p. 914).

One of Baker’s most (in)famous performances may be the final sequence of *La Revue Nègre*, in a piece called the “Danse Sauvage,” in which she burned her way into Parisian memory by appearing on stage barely covered in a pink feather loincloth, doing a full split while hanging upside down from the arms of the giant Joe Alex. In this piece, Baker the African American played the dead prey of the black hunter, portrayed by Alex, a native African.

Contemporary reviewers have recorded Baker’s performances with highly rhetorical performances of their own. For example, in describing the aforementioned dance, journalist Janet Flanner writes:

[Baker] made her entry entirely nude except for a pink flamingo feather between her limbs; she was being carried upside down and doing the split on the shoulder of a black giant. Midstage, he paused, and with his long fingers holding her basket-wise around the waist, swung her in a slow cartwheel to the stage floor, where she stood like his magnificent discarded burden, in an instance of complete silence. She was an unforgettable female ebony statue. A scream of salutation spread through the theater. Whatever happened next was unimportant. The two specific elements had been established and were unforgettable—her magnificent dark body, a new model that to the French provided for the first time that black was beautiful, and the acute response of the white masculine public in the capital of hedonism of all Europe—Paris. [Flanner quoted in Dalton and Gates 1998, p. 914]

An exercise in antitheses, this description pairs burden with vitality, waste with magnificence, subversion (“a new model . . .”) with complicity (catering to white masculine hedonism). Another commentator, French dance critic André Levinson, records:



There seemed to emanate from her violent shuddering body, her bold dislocations, her springing movements, a rushing stream of rhythm . . . In the short *pas de deux* of the savages, which came as the finale of the *Révue Nègre*, there was a wild splendor and magnificent animality. Certain of Miss Baker's poses, back arched, haunches protruding, arms entwined and uplifted in a phallic symbol, had the compelling potency of the finest examples of Negro sculpture. The plastic sense of a race of sculptors came to life and the frenzy of African Eros swept over the audience. It was no longer a grotesque dancing girl that stood before them, but the black Venus that haunted Baudelaire. [Levinson quoted in Dalton and Gates 1998, pp. 914-915]

As Jelavitch (1993) documents, German newspapers at the time praised Baker for her splendidly authentic animality, calling her variously a representative of the Congo basin, a wanton breath of life, the power of nature, and so on. Closer to home, a Baltimore newspaper of 1926 described Baker as opening new avenues of fear—beautiful but terrifying.

There is so much passion and recoil, so much ambivalence about racialized female beauty in all the descriptions above, that one can easily digress into an extended exegesis of each of the above passages. But suffice it to say here that, at the very least, perceptions of Baker were symptomatic of a profound anxiety and/or confusion about the meaning of aesthetics at the intersection of racial and gender differences. This apprehension and consternation express themselves as the two-sided rhetoric of primitivism, whereby idealization runs alongside denigration, aestheticization is paired with bestialization, fascination with horror, and beauty with ugliness.

Baker's public image has been almost exclusively structured along these paradoxes. She has been called, alternately, a ravishing figure of eternal enigma, a beautiful panther, a breath from the jungle, and a beauty for weary Western civilization. Indeed, almost all existing records documenting her performances—significantly, even by those who have more recently attempted to re-

value and recuperate her place in racial history—utilize a rhetoric of seemingly un-self-conscious contradiction. That is, those who now look back on Baker as a subversive performer who intentionally parodies primitivism tend to employ eerily similar rhetoric to that of those who decry her performances as a “sell-out.” Dalton and Gates (1998), for instance, describe Baker as at once “erotic and comic, suggestive and playful, intense and insouciant, primitive and civilized . . . [embodying] the energy of *le jazz* and the elegance of the Black Venus” (p. 918).

Cultural historian Michael Borshuk (2001) writes:

[Baker] was able to diminish the negative power of governing stereotypes . . . by situating herself at the exaggerated limits of those distorted representations . . . thus revealing the illegitimacy of white concocted notions of Negro primitivism and eroticism by situating them within the self-conscious illusory spectacle of the stage. [p. 50]

As captivating as this last reading of Baker is for those of us trying to understand our fascination for her, the truth is that it is highly difficult to imagine her audience as having been shocked into a self-conscious recognition of their own “concocted notions”; they were most likely enjoying the spectacle too much. The problem with this kind of redemptive interpretation of Baker’s act is that it forgets that subversion always tends to reproduce the very stereotypes it means to dismantle in the first place. Furthermore, since excess marks primitivist imagination, there is no such a thing as critical “exaggerated limits of distorted representations.” Primitivism, after all, *relies* on such exaggeration and distortions. Similarly, the attribution of intentionality on the part of Baker herself does not get us away from the problem that, when it comes to the spectacle of the stereotype, execution and parody look uncomfortably similar.

Given this, how do we evaluate Baker’s legacy today? The rhetoric of denigration and celebration that has surrounded the memories of her iconographic figure provides little assistance, since these phenomena themselves participate in the ambivalent dis-

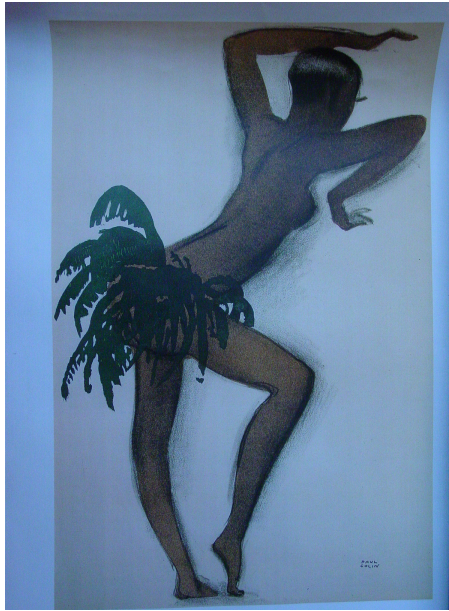


FIGURE 1

course of primitivism, and since they have reduced her performances to either mere surface elements or pure intentionality—when (as I hope I have already shown) *theatricality serves as the mode, not the critique, of the stereotype*. Thus, while it is true that many aspects of Baker's performances (from songs to choreography to costumes) draw relentless attention to the very notion of the fetish, both racial and sexual, this observation, instead of saying something about Baker herself or her politics (whether she is being deliberately subversive or catering to dominant expectations), in fact demands that we engage in a more nuanced study of the convergence of style, history, and performance.

Accordingly, let us begin with one of the most conspicuous examples of what might be called Baker's relentless self-fetishization: her infamous banana-belt skirt (see Figure 1 above<sup>7</sup>). At the

<sup>7</sup> Image courtesy of the Pacific Film Archive and the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

height of her career, she performed at the Folies-Bergère, appearing on stage wearing nothing but a skirt of plush bananas. It was the outfit with which she would be identified with virtually for the rest of her life. The banana skirt as a witty visual joke makes quick allusion to both sexual and racial tropes. But what those allusions add up to is less than clear upon reflection; the symbolic system being presented here is not as transparent as one might initially think. Are the bananas girding Baker's loins a phallic or a racial allusion? Is it the banana or the skirt that is the object of fetishistic investment for the white male audience, or for the white female audience? Is the skimpy skirt a sign of civilization or its inadequacy? And what about the dance partner next to her, shining in all his naked, muscular blackness? In short, what exactly is the fetish in this scene, and for whom?

All these questions hover onstage, haunting the spectacle being offered. It is precisely the multiplicity of these possibilities that highlights the epistemological crisis engendered by the fetishistic system. If Baker is seen as offering a classic spectacle of femininity for the white heterosexual male gaze, she is also serving up that femininity armed with a ring of embarrassingly fruitful phalluses. In fact, looking over the extensive repertoire of visual images left by Baker in photography, print, and film, one notices how she plays up her androgyny almost as often as she plays up her ultra-femininity. The effects of that fantasmatic "phallus" on the "desiring" European, white male audience not only evoke the homo-erotic undertones of heterosexual desire, but also then cross over into the colonial register, where black phallic power symbolically connotes primitive passions. If one sees the bananas as phallic symbols designed to cover Baker's female genitalia, one would also have to confront the possibility that this now phallicized body holds uncomfortable affinity to black masculinity, the "ape" to which both the banana and Baker's dance partner, Joe Alex, allude. And if one sees the skirt as a domestication of Baker's jungle ways, then one must also confront the fact that civilized blackness is flaunting a set of flaccid bananas.

Is the object of enjoyment, finally, the black woman or her black male partner? Does *enjoyment* here denote desire or identi-

fication? If her supposed sexual lack gets transposed onto her abundant bananas, what is there to protect the white male audience members from her gaping yet protruding blackness?

Instead of conferring stable racial or sexual meaning in the face of uncertainty, these contradictory significations foreground the crisis of meaning in the fetish *and* in the cross-cultural exchange between European whiteness and the other. As a fantasy tableau, the viewer's entry point into the Baker-Alex collaboration is significantly multiple. This suggests that the pleasures of racial fetishism for the fetishist is *not* that it protects one from racial otherness, but that it launches one into an imaginary scenario where one gets to *have* and *be* that otherness. Instead of establishing a clear-cut dichotomy between viewer and view, subject and object, master and slave, the *mise-en-scène* actually enables and encapsulates a complex network of mediated desires and cross-narratives. The staging of a clear racial distinction (white audience versus black entertainers) therefore hides a host of cross-identifications. It is precisely the complex dynamics of identification and disidentification, feeding the structure of the fetish, that marks the fetishistic exchange as a *political* one.

Examining Baker's "Danse Sauvage" in detail, we detect a critical perversion of the definitions of mastery and enslavement. Choreographically, this dance offers a story in which Baker portrays the dead prey of a hunter played by Alex, the African native. The dance thus plays on layers of meaning: highlighting Baker's objectification as dancer (the dead weight/burden), as woman (man's prey), as black subject (turned into object), and as American turned into the hunted by "native Africa" (represented by her partner) in a narrative reversal of American slavery. Complex and contradictory messages hover beneath and around the edges of Baker and Alex's performance, belying the simplicity of the distilled image. Baker's performance, in fact, provides an ambiguous site of gender and racial identification and disidentification for her Parisian audiences, even as it also exposes the transnational complications behind the history of racial enslavement.

And Baker herself gets to play out onstage the identities and contradictions inherent in literally every component of the phrase *exiled African American woman*. Given that this is a performance that the African American troop wrote, staged, choreographed, and brought to Paris, we have to wonder whether the *mise-en-scène* might reveal not only white imagination about black imagination, but its inverse as well. The setting theatrical format can hide the circularity of visual exchange that informs this scene of performance.<sup>8</sup> The animation of the audience may be evoked not by the fantasy of available femininity, but by the fantasy of the phallicized jungle. Thus, what was thought to be a scene of heterosexual inflammation potentially turns into a scene of homoeroticism *and* racial contamination.

In other words, this scene unravels the homoerotic possibility underneath the heterosexual one, and then folds that potentially subversive insight back into a conservative, colonial fantasy by suggesting that the primitive (and the perverse) is uncontrollably contaminating: the white men become the savage that they are witnessing—and this “savaging” means simultaneously the assumption of and penetration by the phallus. The potentially subversive sexual meaning is thus produced at the very same moment and symbolic site as the potentially regressive racial meaning. There are both a

<sup>8</sup> This complication of the dynamic interchange—rather than simple a binary division—between the viewing subject and the viewed object has been recently explored in a surprising venue: French film director Sylvain Chomet produced an animated adventure, *Les Triplettes de Belleville* (2003), about three aged song-and-dance team members from the days of Fred Astaire. In a film within the film, we are given a pseudoarchival short clip, featuring none other than Josephine Baker. This animated, caricatured Baker is seen doing her famous banana-skirt dance in front of a rapt, even rapacious, audience of white male patrons. Near the culmination of her performance in this film clip, the male audience, apparently driven wild by Baker’s twitching, half-naked body, rushes the stage in a mob frenzy, proceeding to tear the banana skirt from her body, leaving her naked and quivering. But then something unexpected happens. Instead of relishing or ravaging Baker’s nude body, the white male audience scampers—several on all fours—after the scattered bananas from the skirt, ravenously devouring them like a bunch of monkeys, while Baker, the naked temptress, is left ignored to one side of the stage. In short, the object of desire is not Baker, but her bananas.

white fantasy about blackness and a black fantasy about whiteness at work here; there are also competitive nationalisms in play.

In the light of these complications, the banana skirt offers not a distortion or an exaggeration, but a *literalization* of fetishism as logic: a symbolic overlay of contradictory and non-unidirectional projections, whose givenness is no more a given than that which it purports to hide. The banana skirt, with its supposedly transparent (racial and erotic) joke, thus stands as both reduction and redundancy in the allegorical network embedded within the scene. It offers an abbreviated stylization for a nexus of complex and contradictory fetishistic desires at work. As previously noted, these paradoxes of meaning make sense only when we understand that the fetish is not designed, as may be supposed, to erase difference, but in fact to *maintain and organize* differences. Thus, the fetish always embodies a residue of its own renunciation, and it is only from this remainder (rather than from Baker's personal intentions) that we can construct a political and critical evaluation of this historic performance.

This built-in failure, so to speak, of every successful fetish construction holds profound implications for how we understand the subject and object of discrimination. What we have discovered about the racial fetish is that it defies instead of confirms the distinction between master and object, between control and tumult. One might say that *le tumulte noir* incited by Baker speaks directly to the turmoil of whiteness. But, more than offering a critique of whiteness, the paradoxes of fetishism impel us to reconsider altogether the process of discrimination itself—that is, we are compelled to reexamine the very mechanisms of racial discernment for both dominant and racialized subjects. Indeed, this discussion so far highlights the inadequacy of our vocabulary of (in)visibility, when it comes to racial legibility.

*"All That Glitters Is Not Gold": Princess Tam-Tam*

It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.

—Wilde 1890, p. 45

In order to pursue further this problem of visibility, I will here examine another Baker choreography, in which the fetish structure is at once the content and the form of her performance. It is also a scene in which fetishistic desire frustrates rather than enforces the racial visibility that is so fundamental to both the symptom of racism and the liberal critique of that symptom.

In 1935, Baker starred in the French film *Princess Tam-Tam* (directed by Edmond T. Gréville), which tells the story of a Frenchman, Max de Mirecourt, who escapes to Tunisia in the face of a failing marriage and a failing career as a novelist. There Max meets Alwina (played by Baker), a street urchin, when he catches her stealing a bowl of apples. In this *Pygmalion*-like plot, Max decides to “civilize” Alwina-from-the-jungles, bring her back to Europe disguised as an African princess, launching her into high Parisian society, and using this ambitious undertaking as the basis for his new book, designed to resuscitate his waning career.

The film is replete with colonial fantasies and tropes, its fetishization of the primitive female subject only too apparent. It is fascinating, however, precisely because, in all the ways that it is racist, it also challenges some very fundamental assumptions about racial difference.

In the narrative climax of *Princess Tam-Tam*, Max brings his by-now-much-celebrated African princess to a popular Parisian nightclub to show her off (and to test her), as a culmination of his pedagogical achievement. Alwina enters the club on Max’s arm, clad in a fluid gown of gold lamé—an art-deco dream epitomizing the refinement of civilization. In the background, we see an elaborate floor show performed by white dancers and an orchestra. But while Max is not looking, his wife, Lucy, contrives to have her high-society cronies spirit Alwina away, in order to ply her with alcohol. Meantime, the floor show gradually changes rhythm and shifts into a jungle beat, also secretly arranged by Max’s wife. We see Lucy’s conspirators urge Alwina: “You know you can’t resist it—go ahead, dance!” And, in response, Alwina runs to the top of a spiral staircase that makes up the baroque center-stage area; as she then descends in a rush of dancing pleasure,



she begins to strip off her golden, designer French gown, revealing a black halter dress underneath. She proceeds to dance with abandonment on center stage with her infamous and inimitable style.

It is this style that exposes Alwina's supposedly true identity. At the explicit level, her dancing reveals her blackness: a blackness that is uncovered by Alwina's being irresistibly drawn to the call of the wild, represented by the jungle-beat music and the not-too-subtle ripping off of her gold silk lamé to unsheathe a body clothed in black. Everything in the scene suggests that Alwina's innate, ultimately undisciplinable Africanness is being brought out for all to see.

Yet this narrative account does not quite make sense. Given that Alwina's "true color"—that is, her race—has never been a secret (posing as a princess, she can be said to be passing only at a class level, at most), what is being unveiled here that is so shocking?

We could say, of course, that what has been uncovered is not the literalness of blackness, but a fantasy of it. We are reminded that racial difference works metaphorically and that racial meaning materializes metaphorically, that the blackness of skin in the racist imagination is really nothing more than a redundant sign of savagery, backwardness, licentiousness, and so forth. In short, the blackness of skin operates as something of a banana skirt in this overdetermined value system. The account thus goes: While everyone knows the princess to be black, they have not known *how* black until now. Alwina may be able to pass as a princess, but an African one who can be easily seduced into showing her wild roots. In this account, we are reminded that class is thus not enough to overcome racial difference.

Still, this explanation does not fully address the peculiarities of the scene. There is much in this scene of exhibitionism to suggest that what you see is *not* what you get. For one thing, the stripper does not strip. For another, this catastrophic dance, dependent on notions of visibility and disclosure, oddly enough, also effects a series of visual confusions, even occlusions. Cinema-

graphically, the sequence of Alwina's/Baker's dance is shot in a series of quick jump cuts that literally makes it difficult to *see*. On the one hand, we understand that the editorial style is meant to dramatize the syncopated rhythm of the background music and to enhance the sense of frenzied, "primitive" abandonment. The choppy rhythm of the scene thus structurally gratifies the classically fetishistic construction of black female sexuality in the eyes of a white male audience. On the other hand, the jump shots have the reverse effect of displacing its object of visual focus—that is, cutting into Alwina's number are shots of a host of other subjects: the orchestra of white and black musicians, the large number of white dancers who make up the chorus, the white male and female audience, and so forth, the whole producing a kind of visual proliferation and equivalence in this vibrating number.

In fact, there is a sequence within the dance number in which the viewer sees nothing but a series of indiscriminate, truncated, dancing body parts, both white and black. We are presented with entangled and writhing hands, arms, legs, and feet that belong to everyone and to no one. If Alwina is being displayed as an object of fetishistic voyeurism, then it is surprisingly nonspecific and nonsingular. So what, exactly, is being shown in this scene, and what else is being revealed besides racial difference?

Racial difference is, of course, highly dependent on the visible—that is, on visual availability and legibility. Yet what it means to discern, identify, and recognize someone becomes exquisitely problematic precisely at the *site/sight* of the visible. The fetish, often cited as a particularly ocular fantasy (the "glittery" shine on an individual's nose, for example), engenders, in fact, a crisis of seeing. (In this sense, it is not a coincidence that the mythical figure whom Freud [1922] associated with fetishism was the figure of the blinding Medusa.) For if the film scene of Baker's unwitting exhibitionism is all about revelation and the European audience's prurient intake of that visual exposé, it is also a scene about the *impossibility of looking at the visible*.

The fact is, in this striptease, nothing has been shown. The glitter has been undone to reveal yet another mask. In other

words, the deflecting “shine” of the fetish has been removed, only to reveal not the ghastly gap of castration, but the smoothness of yet another surface. If a part of the illusion of colonial imperialism is the fantasy of penetrating a territory-as-body, then here, in this striptease, the “body” offers itself up not as a body, but as a flexible outline, or, at the very least, as another costume.

This scene of excessive display ultimately scrambles certain assumptions behind the visual legibility of race. Racial difference, which relies so much on visibility for its legibility, reveals itself to be in fact not so distinctive as a mode of differentiation. Yes, everyone in the room of the performance is looking on—avidly—but what they think they are seeing anew, they have always been seeing. If anything is obscene in this scene, it is not the availability of Alwina’s blackness or her femininity, but precisely the *non-showingness* of these attributes. Indeed, amidst the rubbernecking crowd, we see one person who refuses to look: Max, who was responsible for bringing her to Paris and who has supposedly indoctrinated her in French ways. The master puppeteer turns his face away, shielding his eyes. The plot suggests that Max cannot bear to face the exposure of his scheme, his failure to civilize Alwina. “Max cannot bear to witness Alwina’s [blackness]” (Coffman 1997, p. 393).

Yet, given that Alwina’s blackness has always been a visual precondition in the film, I propose that what Max cannot bear to witness is, instead, blackness’s *nothingness*. That is, more than being pained by the exposure of his plot or by Alwina’s embarrassing blackness, Max *cannot* look at Alwina because that would mean looking at the fantasmatic structures of his own desires. Of all the audience in the scene, it is Max—the self-fashioned therapist in charge of treating Alwina’s primitive malady—who comes closest to being confronted by the emptiness behind the colonial fetish: an emptiness/lack that determines not only the object, but also the subject. What Max has to face (and cannot) is the revelation of his (colonial and masculine) desires. Alwina thus “blinds” Max, not because she shows her true nature, but because *the glittery and the darkened turn out to be uncannily equivalent*. The essence of

African blackness, being contrasted against Frenchness through the unfolding of the film's plot, reveals itself to be no more than a costume change.

French civilization is shown here to be a fragile coating, not because Alwina fails to be either real or fake, but because civilization exists as a veneer. The fetishization of the other has revealed the fetishization of the self (in this case, French style), which in turn uncovers the emptiness behind masculine colonial authority. Even the jungle beat that we hear seducing Alwina is itself a version of a French version of primitive music. As the film moves from glitter to filth, Baker's visual and supposedly moral degradation in this scene parallels and bares the structure of white fetishistic desire, an unveiling that is truly obscene for the white male subject—hence, Max's aversion and shielding of his gaze. The teacher/therapist has seen his own illness. If anything is being uncovered in this sequence, it is the *architecture* of fetishistic desire itself.

Moreover, if civilization in this scene is a veneer, authentic blackness shows itself to be equally synthetic. What relationship, indeed, does Baker, an exiled African American, bear to "Africa"? The revelation of the sameness between gold and filth unearths the traumatic historical connections among human bodies, commodity value, and cross-racial negotiation behind the origins of the very term *fetishism*. The film *Princess Tam-Tam*, in which Baker plays an incarnation of "common trash" turned royalty, and in which such a transformation of value is meant to reveal the nature of essentialized blackness, takes the implicit political critique in this historical connection even further. As Saidiya Hartman (in press) poignantly points out:

Before Sigmund Freud detailed the symbolic affinities between gold and excrement, African royals were stockpiling their gold in privies and selling slaves for chamber pots. (And European traders were transforming humans into waste and back again through the exchange of gold.)

In going from glitter to blackness in *Princess Tam-Tam*, Baker has not so much degenerated as she has crystallized the very history of

the "black gold" that fed the slave trade from the West Coast of Africa across the Atlantic. Take the climatic moment in the film and juxtapose it against Baker's performance in the "Danse Sauvage" (where Baker is "captured" by an African), and we have a keen critique of both European and African roles in the history of the Middle Passage.

Far from being a superficial concern, style provides a structural and structuring sign of cultural distinction that provides the very basis for racial differentiation. In *Princess Tam-Tam*, style is a key term for social as well as racial distinction. We know that Alwina's symbolic stripping and moral fall, narratively speaking, hinge on the revelation of taste or lack thereof. It is her dancing that supposedly discloses her true origins by revealing her vulgar tastes and primitive passions. Taste, which signals the ability to make a distinctive perception and stylistic discernment, has become nothing more than fashion and nothing less than the very foundation of racial difference itself. Yet what constitutes taste and distinction, just as what constitutes gold versus dross, is in this scene turned upside down . . . or inside out.

According to the plot of the film, much to the chagrin of Max's wife, Lucy, the Parisian audience within the film seems to actively participate in Baker's joyous dancing, and ends up bolstering Alwina's already considerable celebrity. If taste is a lynchpin in the identification of civilization, then Alwina's success in this number suggests that so-called vulgar tastes are shared by the Parisians. It is *they* who have answered the call of the jungle.

But Alwina's/Baker's relationship to the call of the jungle offers a wholly different and much more profound set of implications. First, for Alwina/Baker, it is, above all, a call to performance. (We cannot forget that this dance exemplifies Baker's star power.) Second, the call of Africa for Baker must pose a complex invitation—not only because the Africa being offered is a white fantasy, but also because "real" Africa must itself be a fantasy for Baker, a subject in exile from both her native African American community and from her "original" Africa. Thus, we might say that the deepest camouflage Alwina has undertaken is not her conspiracy with Max,

but her relationship to her racial origin. Alwina/Baker, in the end, has no more bared her blackness than she has bared her body in this strangely unrevealing strip act. On stage, the reverse image of white civilization and its primitivist projections turns out not to be authentic blackness, but rather a lack of origin. Baker's performance does not recuperate, but instead exposes the black subject as alienation; her dance expresses not so much possession as longing. Baker's self-fetishization, therefore, may indicate something beyond cultural complicity or subversion; it may in fact enact a profound desire for self-recognition.

To "see" Baker in this number means to appreciate her as *representation*. The only authentic element we can locate in this performance within a performance is the virtuosity of movement itself. And it is in this virtuosity that Baker most closely approximates her own image. This perfection—this fullness of self—importantly derives from fragmentation rather than wholeness. We are given neither body nor harmony, but disembodiment and disarticulation. (For example, we notice gestures toward Martha Graham and the development of early modern dance, with its emphasis on figural isolation.) We are given the pleasures not so much of subversion as of rearticulation—an articulation of the lack of essence.

In light of the history of persistent corporealization of the black female body (think of the history of the Venus Hottentot [Gilman 1985]), what I am here calling Baker's *fluid disarticulation of body parts* has much more political impact than any claims to intention or agency in the traditional sense. The fact is that her performance is itself enacting a historical engagement—one that demands that we reconsider just how race, gender, body, and nationhood get staged and recognized. Indeed, one of the more decadent or sensual aspects of this final dance number has much to do with the way it was staged and shot, as mentioned. The edit-and-dissolve shots used throughout the sequence effect a kind of visual blending, whereby bodies and body parts slide and merge into one another, making the distinction of bodies and body parts impossible . . . as if the scene is itself already performing a kind of miscegenation.

We can, of course, view this melding of bodies as a sort of visual realization of colonial authority's anxiety about and desire for primitivism, but this fusion has another performative effect as well. I have noted that civilization (and its concomitant hierarchy of class and national difference) depends on taste and the discernment of style as a foundation for discrimination; that is what we mean, obviously, when we speak of *discriminating* taste. Yet this very scene of discrimination is also, curiously, a scene of *indiscrimination* at the level of style. When we follow the music, choreography, and staging of the scene in its entirety, we have to notice that the show is, above all else, a *mélange* of style.

This unabashed lure of the surface, furthermore, diffuses rather than consolidates racial difference. For if Baker is offering up a unique choreographic diction, the rhetoric of that style is one of exuberant cross-fertilization. Baker's supposedly African and primitive idiom is in fact a combination of sources that include North and South American beat, jazz, and reggae, with stylistic gestures to Caribbean and Latin American dancing, a fusion of various other "ethnic" choreographic movements, as well as the charleston and the cakewalk, the latter two being themselves already the products of racial conflict/subversion/incorporation in the American South.

If anything, the otherness to French colonial identity is not black femininity, but mottled Americanness—the Americanness of diffused styles. Indeed, the most "dangerous" and powerful aspect of this performance might be its suggestion that style, for all its claims to distinctiveness, is highly susceptible to contamination. Baker's performance reminds us that race, ethnicity, and nationalism enter into choreography as denotative *movements*—in short, as stylistic allusions. This susceptibility, furthermore, may prove to be style's most vital contribution to political engagement, for it suggests that cross-fertilization is the inevitable outcome of cross-cultural engagement.

We might say that, in the encounter between the West and its others, difference enters as form. How we *know* someone depends fundamentally on a process of discernment and differentiation, just as how we see ourselves depends on repeated fantasies of our-

selves. In this sense, the other will always remain *other* and *exotic* to us. But to recognize this limitation as built into the politics of recognition is also to recognize our complicity in the fetishistic structure—and it is that complicity that style's promiscuity unveils.

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## RACISM: PROCESSES OF DETACHMENT, DEHUMANIZATION, AND HATRED

BY FARHAD DALAL, PH.D.

*The author looks at definitions of racism from the viewpoints of various theoretical frameworks, addressing the role of projection and other phenomena. Racism is then examined according to principles of psychoanalytic relational theory, attachment theory, and radical group analytic theory. Power relationships, the psychosocial process, a sense of us versus them, and the universal importance of a feeling of belonging are also taken into consideration. In examining the meaning of race, the author addresses the notions of black and white and their evolution over time, as well as the phenomenon of othering.*

A colleague described an experience while traveling on a train during a visit to London. She became aware that she was the only white person in the carriage, and this made her feel frightened and completely alone. This was a remarkable experience because, patently, she was not alone; she was in a carriage *full of people*.

What is going on? How is it that she *feels* alone when patently she is not? Is this kind of experience “racist”? And if so, why?

I do not stand in judgment of my colleague, because I can recognize myself having such experiences continually. Sometimes these differentiations are innocuous or humorous; at other times,

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Some material for this article is drawn from a book by the author, *Race, Colour and the Process of Racialization: New Perspectives from Group Analysis, Psychoanalysis and Sociology* (Dalal 2002).

critical and deadly. The triggers vary hugely: sometimes, color; at other times, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors or something else altogether. This is a way of saying that, in focusing on race and racism, I am not suggesting that this is the primary difference or the only meaningful difference that needs to be attended to. In fact, what I am going to put forward is part of a general theory of difference—in which the fiction called *race* is but one element.

This short vignette speaks to the first of my four questions—just what is racism? My other questions are: How does psychoanalysis tend to explain the phenomenon of racism? Third, how can attachment theory be used to think about racism? And fourth, how and why is it that attachment theory is located outside psychoanalysis by psychoanalysts themselves, as much as by attachment theorists? I will not speak in a neat, linear fashion to each of the questions in turn, as the answers to one problematize the others.

## WHAT IS RACISM?

Is racism a pathology that only some are afflicted with, or is it endemic to the human condition so that all of us are subject to it? Is it the case, as was said in some circles in the 1970s and is sometimes repeated now, that only whites can be racist? And what of the function of racism—is it something destructive or something useful, an adaptive mechanism that has evolved?

Racism tends to be described in two sorts of ways: The first description is at the level of the social world, where it is noted that racism is a form of organizing peoples, commodities, and the relationships between them by utilizing a notion of race. The second description begins in the world of emotions, and indicates that racism consists of the feelings of hatred, disgust, repulsion, and other negative emotions felt and expressed by one group for another.

Now, in general, psychoanalysis tends to look for the causes of things that take place in the “external” social world by examining the goings on of the “internal” psychological world of individuals. For example:

- “A group consists of individuals in a relationship to one another; and therefore the understanding of [the individual’s] personality is the foundation for the understanding of social life.” (Klein 1959, p. 247)
- “All sociological problems are ultimately reducible to problems of individual psychology.” (Fairbairn 1935, p. 241)
- “The basis of group psychology is the psychology of the individual, and especially of the individual’s personal integration.” (Winnicott 1965, p. 146)

It follows, then, that psychoanalysis is bound to look for explanations of racism (that is, explanations of antipathies between peoples taking place in the social world) in the internal world of individuals. We can see that the question of “What is racism?” cannot be separated from speculations about its causes.

Psychoanalysis offers four different kinds of explanations for adult behaviors in general. The first explanation is akin to transference in the sense that Freud first spoke of it: repeating without remembering. Here, events and behaviors in adult life are said to be repetitions and versions of patterns laid down during infancy and childhood. If these developmental events are repeatedly experienced as traumatic, then the adult will behave in disturbed and sometimes aggressive, perhaps racist ways.

The second kind of explanation draws on the individual/group dichotomy. What might be said here is that racism is some kind of group phenomenon that sweeps up individuals into its path through the process of contagion or something similar. In this way of thinking, good people find themselves behaving badly because of being swept up by the group. According to this way of thinking, when in groups, individuals lose their civilized sensibilities and revert to some primeval, savage state.

The third type of explanation postulates that we are driven to act in certain ways by our biological and genetic inheritance—specifically, the instincts. And the fourth explanation, by far the

most commonplace, features the mechanisms of splitting, repression, and projection.

I will begin my critique with the last of these.

## PROJECTION

The idea of projection lies at the heart of most psychoanalytic explanations of social phenomena, generally, and proceeds in the following way: difficulties arising in the internal world of an individual (say, for example, aggressive impulses), which cannot be managed for whatever reason, are split off from consciousness, repressed, and projected into some object or person in the external world. The subject now comes to experience the object/person as difficult in itself (in this instance, aggressive).

This theory works well, but in a limited way, *at the level of a particular individual*. This theory explains why it is that this or that particular individual has hateful feelings toward blacks or some other group of people. However, it does not explain *how* and *why* it is that a whole group of people should simultaneously come to hold hateful feelings toward certain other groups. There is also the issue of why black people, rather than (say) nurses, should come to be used as containers for these unwanted and problematic aspects of the self. And why is it that, in one context, black people come to be these receptacles, while in another context, Protestants do, and so on.

One answer to these challenges, sometimes put forward in psychoanalytic writings, is that these groupings have previously been “socially sanctioned” as deserving of these projections, and so are already denigrated. But this response actually avoids the central issue, which is: how do these groupings come to be socially sanctioned in a particular way in the first place?

Further, this kind of explanation does not address what happens to the unwanted aspects of the individuals who constitute these denigrated groups—blacks, Jews, or women, for example: where are they to project the problematic aspects of *their* psyches? Are they not going to be allowed the same privilege as the non-

denigrated groups of getting rid of problematic aspects of their internal worlds through the mechanisms of splitting and projecting? In sum, what this powerful theory does is to say that the psychological mechanisms of individuals exploit preexisting social conditions in order to manage internal psychological difficulties; but it does not engage with the problem of how those social conditions—specifically, racism—came to be generated in the first place.

## SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCE

Notions of similarity and difference have become buzzwords in this territory. However, in the analytic literature, notions of similarity and difference are rendered curiously asocial, as though all differences were equivalent. They are not. A stranger knocking unexpectedly at the door will elicit quite different associations and emotions, depending on whether he is a young black man or a white man in a suit. Other determining variables are the person opening the door and the location of the door. In other words, one cannot leave the context out of the analysis. There is no such thing as *a stranger* in the abstract—strangers are always particular, embodied and situated. Of course, animosity is by no means the “natural” or inevitable response to meeting a difference; reactions are bound to be predicated on the meanings attributed to, and associated with, that difference. Thus, the particularities of the social context cannot be left out of the analysis, if our examination is not to become reductive.

We are never just *strangers* to each other; we are also simultaneously *familiars*. Let me put it this way: between any two individuals, there is an infinity of similarities and differences. I am similar to you by virtue of at least one attribute, and, *in the same moment*, I am different by virtue of at least one other attribute. Thus, similarities and differences are not absolutes, and neither are they opposites. The experience of similarity and difference can always be deconstructed. For example, in this moment, do you experience me as similar to or different from you? On what basis

—race, culture, ethnicity, gender, or some other category? If you experience me as similar, why are you inclined in that direction at this moment, and what have you done with the differences? And if you are experiencing me as different, what have you done with the similarities? Why?

Positivist ways of thinking about similarity and difference have become taken for granted and unquestioned in our profession—it would appear that people are *either* similar *or* different to each other. For example, Basch-Kahre (1984) takes it for granted that it is a universal truth that one is inevitably afraid of strangers. Her explanation for this is that sources of the fear of strangers are to be found early on in the individual's developmental story, when the baby seeks to keep the father out of the picture by making him unknown and therefore a stranger. This repressed memory is said to be reactivated in adult life with the appearance of *any* stranger, which results in the projection of the old hatred toward the father onto contemporary strangers. She says: "This happens when [we are] confronted with people and cultures in which we can discover *no similarity with ourselves*" (p. 62, italics added). But, clearly, this is an impossibility—that there could be "no similarity" between this analyst and her analysand. We have to ask of the analyst a deeper question: how does the analyst manage the extraordinary feat of experiencing "no similarity"? Recall the vignette at the start of this paper.

In sum, the overwhelming majority of papers in the psychoanalytic literature treat the topics of racism and prejudice as a *symptom*—as the external effect and social expression of internal psychological dynamics. But, as Littlewood and Lipsedge (1989) note, "projection is a mechanism, not an explanation" (p. 29).

## THE RELATIONALISTS

Relationalists, like Fairbairn (1935) and Winnicott (1965), shift their attention from instinct to relatedness, from breast to face, from individual to dyad. In their way of thinking, the sources of problematic adult behaviors are to be found in the particulars of the

individual's developmental story. The thinking here is that people behave cruelly to others later in life because they have been dealt with cruelly in early childhood.

I would go along with the relational view for a considerable way, but, once again, it is an explanation at the level of a particular individual and his or her developmental story. For this kind of explanation to be valid at a societal level, as would be necessary for a phenomenon like racism, the developmental processes of a large number of members of a society would have to be finely synchronized. Surely, this is not a realistic scenario. Further, this explanation does not account for the occasions when racism flares up in previously convivial contexts in which various groups of people have coexisted for many generations.

Another instance of this kind of theory is provided by Chasseguet-Smirgel (1990). She seeks to explain the sources of Nazism by positing the existence of a universal developmental stage, which she calls the *archaic oedipal matrix*. According to her, when in this stage, one is said to find it difficult to tolerate difference, and so seeks to merge with mother—i.e., to *be the same as* mother. But, in the fullness of time, this matrix is supplanted by the normal oedipal matrix, after which it is possible to accommodate *difference*.

Chasseguet-Smirgel then suggests that the German nation was for a time “stuck” in the archaic matrix, where Nazi ideology found its sources. According to her, Nazi ideology is actually the wish for the body of the German people (the Aryans) “to become one with the body of the Mother (the German homeland, the whole earth)” (Chasseguet-Smirgel 1990, p. 171). For this merging to proceed, the body of the German people had to be made pure—that is, homogenized—and so all differences (as exemplified by the Jew, the homosexual, and so on), as obstacles to this union, had to be purged and annihilated: “In order to form a single body, its constituent cells must be identical, purified of all foreign elements liable to impair its homogeneity” (p. 171).

As noted, such a theory can be valid at the societal level only in the event that a whole nation of individuals were to fall prey to the archaic matrix at about the same time, with many or most of



them failing to complete the proper resolution of such a complex. And then, miraculously, at a certain later time, much of the nation would simultaneously come to resolve the complex. Another problem with this kind of theory is that it has taken for granted the idea of being Jewish as *foreign*, different and opposite to that of being German. Questions avoided by this kind of analysis are: How was it that the Jew came to be thought of as alien to a vision of Germanness? What is the ontological status of the category *Aryan*, and from whence did it come? And so on.

Interestingly, much of psychoanalytic thinking has been reluctant to allow the external social world to play a *causal* role in the structuring of internal distress, and, instead, is more likely to explain difficulties in the external social world as due to, and driven by, distress in the internal world. For instance, Basch-Kahre (1984) says that the explanation for her black African patient's "deep feeling of being worthless whenever the theme of the stranger was brought up . . . [was to be found in] his experience of weaning and with his oedipal conflict" (p. 65). The fact that the patient was unable to advance in his job was explained completely by this feeling of inferiority—in other words, the state of his internal world. No thought is here given to the external circumstances that (a) might contribute to his sense of inferiority, and (b) might make it hard for him to advance on a practical level. While his particular experience of weaning no doubt played a significant role in the structuring of his feelings of worthlessness, no space is given to the possibility that *components* of his worthlessness might also have to do with particular experiences of living as a black man in a predominantly white European country.

Not only does the literature tend to explain the external by the internal; it also often tends to interpret engagements in the external social world as a type of pathology or as an acting out. For example, Myers (1977) understands his black female patient's increasing involvement with black militant groups as a flight from her rage toward him. But one could construe the patient's new capacity for involvement with such groups as a sign of increasing health and self-esteem born of the analysis. Further, Myers reports

that the patient's self-esteem indeed increased following this involvement, as revealed in her dreams; however, he does not give *any* credit to her involvement in the external dimension for her internal changes: "While some of this [gain] was related to modifications in the patient's self-esteem as a result of the analytic work, a good deal of it was related to her intense need to deny the underlying degraded black self-representation" (p. 173). In other words, the patient's improvement was in part *real* because of the analytic work, and in part *false* because it stemmed from the *repression* of her "degraded black self-representation."

Another instance is found in the description by a black psychotherapist, D. E. Holmes (1992), of her patient Miss A, who was also black. Miss A's presenting complaint was the so-called irrepressible urge to take part in the race riots in her city. Holmes says that, through their work together, they "came to understand her protestations as warded-off self-loathing, which itself was in part a defence against recognition of her rage, the threatened eruption of which had brought her to treatment" (p. 3). Thus, political rage is understood as a displacement of the patient's *real* internal and personal rage. It is at the very least curious that her self-loathing is understood *only* as a defense, and not as a symptom of living in a racist context.

My intention is not to dismiss internalist psychoanalytic explanations of social phenomena out of hand, but rather to point out their limitations. I find these ways of thinking useful and essential to my clinical work; however, when they are put forward as the *only* explanations and pose as being complete, then they lose value and become dangerously reductive—in which case, they do not so much explain as *explain away*.

Theories (no less than people!) do not fit neatly into boxes. I have perhaps added to the confusion here by speaking of the relationalists in the same breath as Basch-Kahre and Chasseguet-Smirgel. In fact, in the foregoing, one finds two distinct ideologies. The theories of the relationalists Winnicott and Fairbairn would tend toward the belief that racist behaviors and hatreds in general, as manifested in later life, find their genesis *in things hav-*

*ing gone wrong* in the developmental process; this, then, logically leads to the proposition that only *some* people turn out to be racist. Meanwhile, the Basch-Kahre and Chasseguet-Smirgel models propose that racism is a natural outcome of a *universal* developmental process, so that *all* people are prone to it.

Confusingly, I find myself agreeing with aspects of both: with the latter thesis that we all find ourselves engaging in racist practices (but not for the reasons suggested by these models); and I also agree with the relational thesis that the developmental processes are driven by the specifics of our actual lived experiences, rather than by fantasies.

In what follows, I will propose a way of thinking that directs us toward resolution of this contradiction. But before that, let me attend to attachment theory.

## ATTACHMENT THEORY

Although attachment theory in its classical form shares much common ground with psychoanalytic relationalists' thinking, it is distinct from theirs in that it prioritizes the idea of *attachment* over that of *relationship*. Attachment theory indicates that psychological relationships are generated by and through the biological processes of attachment, which are themselves generated by evolutionary processes to ensure that caregiver and the vulnerable young stay in close proximity to each other.

Attachment theory is also close to the theory of the instinctivists in that, in both schemata, the first impetus of the infant is generated by its biology. In fact, one could say that all three of these formulations are instinctivist, in a sense, with the differences being the differing aims of the instinct according to each schema: for instinctivists per se, the aim is to discharge; for relationalists, to relate; and for attachment theorists, to attach.

Of course, the word *instinct* here means simply that we are biological beings that have our evolutionary history written into our bodies. Theoretical disputes focus on just *what* is written into the body and *how fixed* it is. I am inclined toward a stance akin to the

relationalist, intersubjectivist, and attachment schemata, rather than toward those that make hypothetical notions like the death instinct central to their cogitations.

The first thing to be said is that the so-called *secure base* in an individual's developmental history should not really be referred to in that way; rather, it should be called simply the *base*—because, although one is bound to attach to it, it is not always experienced as the source of security per se. As attachment theory tells us, we do not have a choice about whether or not to attach; we cannot help but attach, however vile or neglectful the base may be. Imagine the torture of having to hold onto something that is too hot for comfort in order not to fall to one's death, and then think of the conflicting impulses that one would have to contend with; such a scenario gives quite a good idea of the psychological scars in which this kind of attachment experience would result.

Problematic attachment histories lead to the generation of avoidant, ambivalent, or disorganized patterns of relating to others. In these instances, the mode of interrelating becomes a mixture of being preoccupied with the self while being avoidant and/or hypervigilant toward others. Often, aggression surfaces as a means of coping with difficulties in the internal world. These terms—*avoidant*, *hypervigilant*, *aggressive*, and so on—are frequently found in descriptions of racist phenomena. So, if one were to think of racism as a pathology, as a symptom and a sign of something's having gone wrong in the developmental process, then, according to this theory, it is here in this grouping that we would look to find its sources and genesis.

This way of conceptualizing the problem suggests that securely attached persons are not likely to be racist. De Zulueta (1993), arguing from a broad relational/attachment perspective, says:

Racism . . . begins, as all acts of dehumanization, by a distortion of perception . . . . This cognitive process *originates* . . . from the experience of abuse which the infant or child attempts to ward off by identifying with the aggressor . . . . *The seeds of . . . racism . . . are sown in the emotional wounds of the abused and traumatized.* [p. 244, italics added]

De Zulueta goes to the limits of the hypothesis to assert that racist beliefs can “*only* take [hold] . . . where the psychic template of dehumanization *already exists*” (p. 244, italics added). By using the term *only*, she argues that developmental difficulties are a *necessary* condition (but not *sufficient*) for racist behavior to occur. But if this were true, then how is it that, even on occasions when the developmental process has gone adequately well, we find people behaving in racist ways? Something has escaped our efforts to examine the situation. I very much agree with de Zulueta that those with problematic early attachment histories are perhaps more likely to behave in ways that we might call racist; and, although I would consider her very much an ally in terms of the arguments I develop, my point of disagreement with her is this: that while problematic developmental histories can be (and often are) contributory, they are neither *necessary* nor *sufficient* for racist phenomena to emerge.

I want to stress again that I do not dispute that difficulties during the early part of the developmental process will have a significant impact on possibilities and behaviors in adult life. No doubt, if one were to probe the developmental history of Dr. Shipman (a medical doctor in the United Kingdom who was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of elderly patients over many years), for example, one would find events that could reasonably be said to have contributed to his psychic structure and behavior. However, the fact that racism, in the sense I have described it, grips all of us at different times suggests that one needs to extend the theoretical frame in order to be able to more fully consider the nature of racism. This would be like asking ourselves: how would we set about explaining a nation of Dr. Shipmans?

It is for these reasons that it seems to me that, *in its first and classical form*, attachment theory shares the same weaknesses as that of the relationalists, in that, although the world taken account of is interpersonal and external, it is not yet social. The relationships and attachments that are spoken about continue to take place in a sociological vacuum, and, further, they take place between biological entities, like mother, child, father, sibling, and so on.

In contrast to those of other schools of psychoanalysis, contemporary attachment theorists have specifically set about testing their hypotheses in other cultures and contexts. In doing so, they acknowledge that the shape of the infant's developmental process is formed by and mediated through the cultural systems in which this takes place. It follows, then, that each cultural system will generate its own forms of attachment, which legitimate different ways of being together. This is akin to the multicultural ethos of respecting differences—the idea that we are equal but different. But I think that one needs to go even farther than this and engage with the problematic of power.

In my opinion, the schema best positioned to help us engage with the notion of power is that of Foulkesian group analysis, and in particular the radical version of it (Dalal 1998, 2002). In what follows, I will briefly introduce relevant group analytic thinking, and then use it to offer an elaboration of attachment theory in order to make new sense of racism.

## RADICAL GROUP ANALYTIC THINKING

I will introduce four elements from radical group analytic theory that are pertinent to the subjects under discussion—specifically, from the works of psychoanalyst and group analyst S. H. Foulkes (1948, 1964) and sociologist Norbert Elias (1976, 1978, 1991, 1994).

### *I. Power*

The first element, power, is extensively addressed by Elias. He argues that power is an inescapable aspect of all human relationships. And this is so because, as human beings, we are interdependent. Interdependence is another word for *function* or *need*. To say that person A *has a function* for person B is to say that B *needs* A. And if B needs A, then A has power over B. However, the reverse will also be true, though not in the same way.

Hegel (1967) famously showed that the slave is not entirely powerless; the master needs the slave, even if only in the minimal sense of the slave's continued existence in order for the master to

continue as exploiter. One can see in the foregoing example, then, that the relationship between A and B is interdependent, even while it is also bound to be asymmetrical. A constrains B—and *vice versa*; it is this kind of enabling constraint that is described as *power relations*. Elias (1976, 1978, 1991, 1994) notes that power is not a thing that one individual possesses and another does not; no one can be completely powerless or completely powerful. Power is, first and last, a relational attribute. Thus, we can say that all relationships are of necessity power relationships.

## II. *The Psychosocial Process*

The second element consists of a challenge to the metapsychological assumption that the social and psychological worlds are fundamentally different levels of existence. Elias dissolves this dichotomy. He does not propose the more limited idea that these two regions influence each other, because this would be to retain an idea of the two regions as separate. Rather, his statement is more fundamental: that the social and psychological are two aspects of the same process.

Foulkes (1948, 1964) offers a helpful analogy. Imagine that you and I are each driving on our particular journeys. In this, we are akin to autonomous individuals. But soon we both end up in a traffic jam, and it now appears to each of us that “something *outside* me” is “acting *against* me,” “preventing me” from exercising autonomy. The name that we give to this kind of experience—an experience that we actually help to create, to sustain, and remain integral to—is *society*.

## III. *“I” and “We”*

The third element reverses the usual arrangement between the individual and the social. As we have already seen, the logic of psychologies that prioritizes individuals over society leads us to think of the social subject, *we*, as secondary, something that is constituted by the coming together of a number of preexisting individual subjects, the *I*s. Specific forms that societies take are

therefore said to be driven by the goings on in the internal worlds of individuals coming together.

Radical group analysis reverses this to say that the *I* is constituted by the varieties of *we* that one is born into. Each of us, as a particular individual, is born into a preexisting society constituted by a multiplicity of overlapping and conflicting cultures. The cultures themselves, as well as the relationships between cultures, are constituted by power relationships. As we grow and develop, we imbibe, of necessity, the preexisting cultural forms, habits, beliefs, and ways of thinking around us. These introjections are not taken into an already-formed self; rather, they come to *contribute* to the formation of that self. Further, because the relationships between the varieties of *we* are of necessity power relationships, then we can say that the *I*—the me—is constituted at the deepest of levels *by and through the power relationships* that are part of the social fabric one is born into.

Foulkes (1948, 1964) is not espousing a kind of social determinism in which human beings are mere pawns of social forces. As will become clear, to think in the way described does not mean denying the existence of individuals, each with his or her unique sense of self, nor denying that all are biological beings in bodies.

#### *IV. Belonging*

The fourth element concerns the notion of belonging. Foulkes asserts that there is a fundamental need in all human beings to belong—to be part of an *us*—as a condition for psychological well-being. But even to put it in this way, to say that there is a need to belong, misrepresents the situation, as it implies that there is a possibility of *not* belonging. In fact, we cannot *not belong*.

### SOCIALIZING ATTACHMENT THEORY

Returning now to attachment theory, I would like to point out that the ideas introduced above via radical group analytic theory are not unfamiliar to contemporary attachment theorists, such as Fonagy



(2001) and J. Holmes (1993). Fonagy believes that the child comes to form its sense of self through internalizing the picture in the parent's mind of the child's state of mind. He says that this is the mechanism through which the child comes "to form the core sense of himself" (2001, p. 175).

However, the parent does not just experience the child per se, but rather as a particular kind of child. The parent, like all of us, will be led to particular ways of experiencing the world according to the conventions written into the discourses we inhabit. For example, it is a widely accepted finding that caregivers tend to treat male offspring more favorably than female ones. It has been found that, even while teachers imagine that they are giving equal amounts of time and attention to pupils of both sexes, the males tend to get more. Along another axis, it is not uncommon for the arrival of darker-skinned children to be less welcomed than that of lighter-skinned children in many Asian and Afro-Caribbean families (Fletcher Smith 2000).

I do not wish to imply that all female and all darker-skinned children might be universally, uniformly, and inevitably denigrated, as this would be a form of social determinism—a concept that I do not subscribe to. One reason things are not so fixed is that we inhabit multiple discourses at the same time, discourses that continually contest and subvert each other. But the point is that we are never outside our discourses; we are never in an ideology-free zone.

It seems to me that the caregiver reflects back to the infant much more than a picture of *the infant's state of mind* as it exists in *the caregiver's mind*. The caregiver is also giving back to the infant the caregiver's *attitude* toward the infant, which comes in turn to inform the growing infant's attitude toward itself, its self-esteem. Central to my thesis is that the attitudes of the caregiver are severely constrained by the discourses that have formed the caregiver's self. These attitudes being reflected to the child exist outside the scope of the caregiver's consciousness; otherwise, our consciousness could not take the forms that it does. Foulkes calls this grounding, which is taken for granted and which *forms* our responses, thoughts, and experiences, the *social unconscious*.

A similar view is found in attachment theory. Liotti (1987, cited in J. Holmes 1993) calls these schemata *super conscious*, rather than unconscious, and says that they are the organizing principles that “govern the conscious processes without appearing in them” (J. Holmes 1993, p. 170). In a similar vein, what I am arguing is that the image of the self taken in by the infant from its caregivers is, from the first moments, intrinsically social—by which I mean that the infant is never just an infant per se to itself, but rather a *particular* infant who, by virtue of its attributes, finds itself situated and positioned in the caregiver’s affections, and so comes eventually to similarly situate and position itself.

This means that one may no longer draw a dichotomy between a social self and a personal or true self, because the personal self *is* intrinsically social. Hume (1748) was onto something similar when he speculated that there is no such thing as a self outside, beyond, or prior to the attributes that one can name about the self.

This way of thinking—in which the external social world and the things that actually go on between people are given a fundamentally formative role in the creation of what takes place in the so-called internal world of individuals—is anathema to certain psychoanalytic orthodoxies, in which there is a tendency to give developmental primacy to a notion of fantasy over lived experience. Clinical training programs grounded in these traditions teach novices to read the patient’s descriptions of actual, enacted events as signs and ciphers pointing to the workings of the psychological world; and if the therapist treats these descriptions more straightforwardly (by which I do not mean a naive acceptance), as playing a causal role in their own right, then it is taken to be the case that the therapist has been seduced by the patient, and has capitulated in some way.

This worldview has a very powerful grip on our profession, so much so that even analysts who give credence and weight to so-called external differences, such as color, tend to talk of these differences in terms of their use by the patient as defenses, and to characterize successful therapies as moving past these external differences to some deeper level, to engage with the “real” person

behind these categories. Indeed, the attention paid to the lived external world in an attachment-theory approach is one of the reasons why this theory is sometimes viewed with hostility and contempt by certain groups within psychoanalysis.

In the foregoing, I have been leading up to the idea that the so-called social categories of identity (in general) are integral to a deep sense of self, the experience of the *true me*. And, if we accept this, *then it follows that, in attaching to others, we are also, of necessity, attaching to categories*, however subliminal our sense of those might be.<sup>1</sup>

Actually, attachment is not a strong enough word, because it suggests a picture in which two preexisting selves secondarily come to attach to each other. But what is actually being suggested and described by Fonagy (2001), Foulkes (1948, 1964), and others is the radical idea that *there is no self* prior to processes of attachment and introjection, and that the infant's self is constructed through the attachment processes themselves. To restate this in group analytic language would be to say that *who I am* is the same as *where I belong*. We can see, then, why it is that, when the social identities one finds oneself imbued with are trampled on, tampered with, trivialized, denigrated, or dismissed in some way, one is powerfully affected; such experiences are likely to be perceived as attacks on one's integrity and as a violation of the sanctity of one's being.

To reinforce the point: we do not just attach to people; we also attach to categories. However, thinking in these terms may make things in the internal world appear more fixed than they actually are, as I shall discuss in what follows.

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The preceding discussion renders the world too simple on two counts: First, it takes categories of belonging, such as white, Mos-

<sup>1</sup> Cole (2005) develops further arguments concerning our relationships to categories—this time, those based on sexual orientation.

lem, and so on, to be facts that straightforwardly exist out there in the world. Second, the categories have been described as though they are homogenous unities. I will unpack these simplifications and begin with two premises: (1) that we cannot *not attach*, nor can we *not belong*, and (2) attachment and belonging are aspects of the same process.

The idea of belonging is paradoxical in that, for the experience of belonging to be meaningful, two conditions must be fulfilled: First, in order to belong to one group, it is necessary for there to be another one *not* to belong to. Second, it has to be the case that only *some* may belong to the group, and others are not allowed to belong. If these two conditions are not fulfilled, then the belonging category becomes infinitely large, encompassing everything and everybody, and so becomes meaningless.

In other words, intrinsic to the notions of attaching and belonging is the negation of something and someone. Winnicott (1965) alluded to a similar idea when he described the infant's first *I am* moment, in which it gathers itself together, as a *paranoid* moment. This is because the infant, in collecting elements from the environment with which to form itself, simultaneously repudiates other elements. In a sense, the infant is saying to the *not-me* elements: "You don't belong." Having made this gesture, the infant now fears attack from the repudiated elements, and thus comes the paranoia.

Winnicott suggests that *we* groups come about through a very similar mechanism: repudiation of the elements designated as *not-we*. Or, to put it another way, a *we* can exist *only* in contrast to a *them*. Or, putting it still another way, even as one makes a gesture of inclusion in one direction, at the very same moment, one cannot help but make a gesture of exclusion toward every other direction.

Let me add here two well-known jokes, which are really parables:

1. A woman gives her husband two ties. When she sees him wearing one of them, she exclaims, "So—you did

not like the other one!" When I was first told this, I understood the moral of the story to be that, in choosing one thing over another, we are not necessarily condemning that other. But, over time, I have come to think that a negation of some sort is in fact taking place here—precisely because, in that moment, one object has been chosen over the other. The two ties are different and *not equal*.

2. A devout orthodox Jew found himself marooned on an uninhabited island. When he was rescued many years later by a passing ship, the rescuers were astonished to see that he had built himself a synagogue to worship in. But then, as they rounded the island, they were further astonished to see a second synagogue. Mystified, they asked the castaway why he had built two synagogues. He replied that one was the synagogue he went to, and the other was the synagogue he did not go to.

Fortified by these parables, I will now elaborate further.

It is important to keep in mind that it is always impossible to identify just what the essence is of any particular *us*—say, *Britishness*. When we look directly at the British *us*, we find not homogeneity, but heterogeneity: vegetarians, whites, landlords, Kleinians, Scots, blacks, football hooligans, accountants, Christians, Moslems, fascists, liberals, and so on. And if one turns one's attention to each of these subgroupings, they, too, dissolve into further arrays of diversity. I think it is precisely because of the impossibility of finding and naming the essence of the *us* that one looks to the margins—to the *not us*.

Accordingly, the *us* is defined not so much by what it is as by what it is not. The structuralist Saussure (1959) said pretty much the same thing, that "concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content, but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what others are not" (p. 117). And there is no unity to be found in the *not us* either.

In sum, the impression of difference and otherness between *us* and *them* is as illusory as is the impression of solidity and cohesion within *us* and *them*. However, these illusions are nonetheless powerful, and come to have a life as facts, both in our psyches and in our engagements with each other. They come to have a particular kind of reality.

Given the fragility of these ways in which we belong, as well as the fact that there is an infinity of alternative belongings continually available to each of us, we are prompted to ask: How and why do we come to experience one encounter as taking place *across a difference*, and another as *within a region of similarity*? What leads us to assert that the psychotherapy taking place between Mr. Smith and Dr. Singh is multicultural, while that between Mr. Smith and Dr. Jones is not? As noted earlier, it is quite possible to frame both encounters in terms of similarity as well as difference.

The answers to these questions, I would say, have to do not with the nature of the differences themselves, but with the *functions* that the processes of differentiation are being employed to perform. It is not the case that one simply finds a difference, which one then finds oneself responding to. Rather, *one finds oneself emphasizing certain differences in order to create a differentiation*. The questions that should constantly be asked are: Given the infinity of differences (and similarities) between two human beings, how and why are we led in a particular moment to experience and construe one difference as primary and to render the others less meaningful? What—and importantly, whose—purpose is being served by making the differentiation here rather than there? We should remember that differences are evoked *in order to make a differentiation*—and, more specifically, a differentiation between the *haves* and the *must not haves*.

All societies, all cultures, are not homogeneities, but rather are structures of power relations in which different groupings—each with its own agendas and beliefs—contest each other. For example, not only are Brahmins going to have a very different experience of Hindu culture than that of the Untouchables, but there are also going to be variations in the experiences of one Brahmin from another.

Now, it is precisely because of the fluidity of these boundaries that the danger of one sort of *us* dissolving and reorganizing into another sort of *us* is ever present; and so continual work is required to shore up and bolster the *us*. This work takes several forms. One bit is done for us silently and automatically by our cognitive mechanisms. Social scientists have demonstrated that when the mind uses an attribute to make groupings out of continuities, there follows a kind of hallucination in which it seems to us that those within each of the groupings appear to be more similar than they actually are, and that the gap between the groupings appears to be greater than it actually is (Brown 1988, 1995; Turner and Giles 1981). This cognitive hallucination is necessary for the formation and experience of categories (see Dalal 1998, 2002).

But this silent shoring up is not enough to maintain solidity of the *us*, and so the emotions are called into play to help maintain distance between *us* and varieties of *them*. The primary additional mechanism is one in which the *them* are denigrated, while the *us* are idealized. The notions of denigration and idealization, being absolute (good and only good, bad and only bad), create the impression of an antithetical dichotomy between *us* and *them*—a dichotomy with a vast intermediary chasm. In other words, *this process has created the illusion of types*.

One of the most prodigious of these illusory typologies is the one we call *race*.

## BUT WHAT IS RACE?

Whatever race is, it is used to sort varieties of humankind. Implicit here is the apparent truism that *there are different kinds of humans to be sorted*. But, in fact, when one tries to examine the notion of race, it disintegrates. The attempts to define and distinguish race (physiology) from culture (behavior and beliefs) and from ethnicity (the internal sense of belonging) continually fail, as the attempted definitions of all continually collapse into each other.

Bailey's (1996) definition is a particularly telling one: "The term '*Ethnic Minority*' is much debated, but includes a wide variety of *races* and *cultures*, both *black* and *white*" (p. 89, italics added). This failure to make and sustain distinctions between the three terms—race, culture, and ethnicity—highlights the idea that there is something problematic about the attempt to divide up humanity in this way. However, curiously, notions of *black* and *white* have been used from very early on to characterize all three categories; we talk easily of black and white races, cultures, and ethnicities. This observation serves as a prompt to now shift our attention to notions of black and white.

Is it not curious that the people whom we call *black* and *white* are not actually chromatically black and white? How do they come to be so named? Through tracing the semantic history of the words *black* and *white* in the English language, one discovers that the words started off as relatively neutral. (See graph on the following two pages, "Semantic History of the Words *Black* and *White*.") Over the last millennium, the two terms have increasingly gathered associations of negativity and positivity, respectively, as is evident from the graph. There are two periods in which there were dramatic bursts of new associations to the terms: the Middle Ages (the time of the Crusades), and from the sixteenth century onward (the beginning of the imperial adventure).

It is surprising to discover how recent so many of these associations are. The association of *black* with dirt was first recorded in 1300 A.D., with death in 1400, with immorality in 1552, and with evil in 1581. Eventually, elements that can have no color, like negative emotions, began to be called *black*, from the seventeenth century onward. This last point is a particularly telling one: as the world became increasingly color coded, so did the psyche.

There is a double movement here: on the one hand, the attachment of *black* to a thing lends that thing a negative value, impelling one to push it away; and, on the other hand, things imbued with negativity are increasingly perceived as "naturally" having something *black* about them. The conclusion I draw is that blackness gets attached to a thing *in order* to cathect it with repulsion, and the converse becomes true of whiteness.



# SEMANTIC HISTORY OF THE

0 AD

500 AD

1000 AD

*Neutral: color, etc.*

## Uses of *Black*

*Neutral: clear, color, silver*

*Symbolic of spiritual purity,*  
71 AD

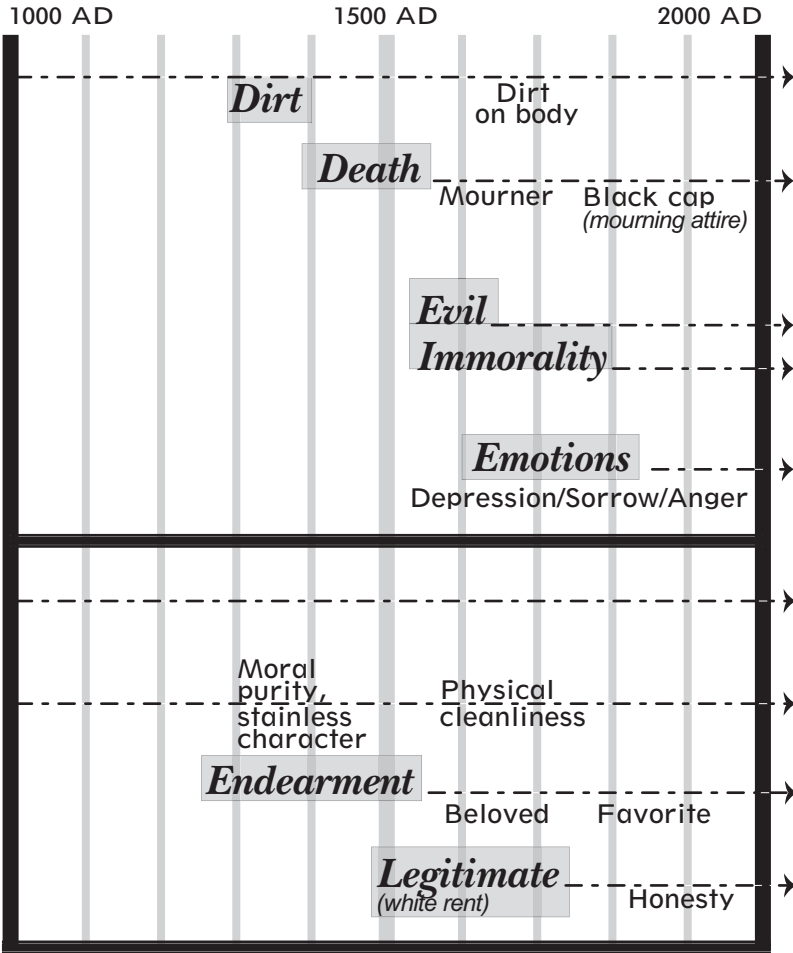
## Uses of *White*

### BLACK AND WHITE

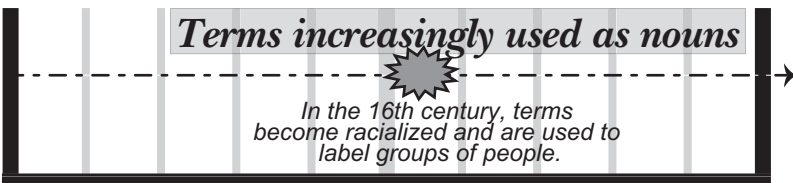
*Initially used primarily as adjectives*

For example, Tom,  
a white person with black  
hair, might be called "Black Tom."

# WORDS *BLACK* AND *WHITE*



## APPLIED TO PEOPLE



For example, it is surprising to discover that, in English, the so-called Black Plague of the thirteenth century was not called the *Black* Plague until the nineteenth century. Similarly, the Black Prince was first so called 200 years after his death. It is my contention that, during this epoch, notions of white and black became honed into powerful tools that could be used to lever things—and people—into territories designated as good or bad, in or out, us or them. These terms became instruments of inclusion and exclusion. The hollowness of race as a category is one of the reasons that it has come to rely on something that appears more substantial (that is, notions of black and white), in order to sustain itself.

*Black* and *white* were first used to *name races*—that is, as nouns for people of different types—in the sixteenth century. By this time, the words had already been loaded up with many of the associations that they have continued to bear. Thus, the naming of people as *black* or *white* is not so much a descriptive act as an *othering* process—a racializing process.

Something very similar is taking place with the seemingly more innocuous terms *culture* and *ethnicity*. It is no coincidence that people designated as black were first given the name *black* by those who designated themselves as white. But there was no “done deal” here, either; for example, there were periods of time when enormous debates and struggles took place about whether the Irish were to be admitted to the category *white*, as was also the case for southern Europeans.

One of the troubles with the notion of race is that people tend to take its existence as fact, and to then use this thing called *race* to be, in itself, the source and explanation for racism. Why did riots occur in Chicago, or in Bradford? Answer: because of racial difference. The solution offered by the multiculturalists is to invite us to “tolerate” difference.

Meanwhile, some sociobiologists (e.g., Smith 1988; Van den Berghe 1988) explain away the situation through a four-stage argument based on the concept of the *selfish gene* (Dawkins 1976). They begin with the assertion that we are programmed by the evolutionary process to act in ways that will enhance the chances of our

genes' survival and multiplication. Next, we are said to share more genes with kin than with not-kin, and this makes us automatically favor our own kin over others. Third, ethnicity or race is said to be an extension of kinship, and so we are thought to naturally favor those of the same race or ethnic group over others. And, finally, when we behave in these "natural" ways—we are accused of being racist.

Here are some of the flaws in this argument: Any human grouping is found to have approximately 15% of its DNA patterns in common. This means that the other 85% is shared with the rest of humanity. So why should this 15% seek to favor its kin, and not the other 85%? It is also the case that we share 98% of our DNA with chimpanzees—yet we do not treat them especially well. And, finally, we need go back only 150,000 years to find one of the common ancestors for all of humankind (Dawkins 1996)—thus, in a very real sense, we are all kin.

We are forced to return to the perplexing question: if there are no races, then what is racism? It seems to me that the only way to answer this is to say that racism is anything—a thought, feeling, or action—that uses the notion of race as an activating or organizing principle. Or, to put it another way, *racism is the manufacture and use of the notion of race*. It is evident that this definition of racism is one of *activity*; thus, I would say that more useful than the notion of racism is that of *racialization*—the process of manufacturing and utilizing the notion of race in any capacity. I am suggesting that the term *racialization* (with its emphasis on activity and an activity that requires our continual cooperation) captures the sense of the phenomena under discussion more accurately than the term *racism* (which has something passive in its connotations).

The fact that we inhabit a racialized and color-coded world means that, through the psychosocial developmental process, each of us, of necessity, imbibes a version of that world order, such that our psyches, too, become color coded and racialized. And then, in turn, we continue to reproduce and sustain the processes of racialization, despite our efforts not to do so.

## PROCESSES OF OTHERING

Fonagy (2001) comments poetically: “At the core of the mature child’s self is the other at the moment of reflection” (p. 173). But this other at the core of the self is not really *other* because, by definition, it is part of the self. And, since it is part of the self, one recognizes the other in the self and the self in the other. Perhaps another term for this kind of recognition is *empathy*. To my mind, empathy is another way of thinking about these benign forms of attachment.

Now, whatever racism is, it is essentially a dehumanizing process through which *an other* is transformed into *The Other*, from one of *us* into one of *them*. The racialized and dehumanized other is positioned outside the moral universe, with all its attendant requirements and obligations to fellow human beings. However, one of the points I have been arguing is that strangers are not encountered, but made—we estrange them. This act of othering, or estranging, in part consists of the activity of repressing, subjugating, and annihilating the similarities between self and other and the ways in which the other is known and understood.

One could call this a *detaching process*, through which differences are named and amplified in order to simultaneously create and detach from the *them*. Anything can be alighted on, and, once alighted, it seems ever so natural that that difference is anathema to us. Recall that in *Gulliver’s Travels* (Swift 1726), two nations differentiated themselves and went to war on the basis of which end of a boiled egg should be broken into first.

In an arena such as this, then, the purpose of naming a difference is to make a division between the *haves* and the *must not haves*. When one difference weakens in our attempts to accomplish this task, we amplify others. For example, tales told by European adventurers during the late Middle Ages described Africans in language that we would today call racist. However, the word *race* was not used. To my mind, this was because there was no need to do so, as Africans were thought of as something not quite human. The notion of race made its entry at the point that it became clear

that Africans are, in fact, part of humanity; then it began to be said that they might be human, but that they were of a different race. As the notion of race crumbled, the notion of culture was brought to the fore; what was then said was that we are all the same race, but we have different cultures. And, finally, ethnicity made its entry, once it became hard to sustain a meaningful distinction between cultural groupings—say, between Hindus and Moslems in India, or between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East. The categorical terms change from *race* to *culture* to *ethnicity*, but the process remains the same.

The fact is that the othering process is a work that is continually being done, because of the ever-present danger that some of *them* will become *us*. In part, this work consists of creating and maintaining a buffer of hatred, disgust, and contempt. But the fact that this work requires a continual engagement with *them* in order to estrange *them* means that perhaps the idea of detachment does not actually capture all of what is going on.

In order for a *we* to exist, the *we* need a *them* to continue to exist—but at a distance. Thus, the *we* need to be continually in touch with the *them*, paradoxically, in order to keep *them* at a distance. Could we say, then, that this kind of paradoxical keeping-in-touch/distancing is also a form of attachment? If we continue down this road, then could we say, too, that hate is a form of attachment?

The predicaments we have to continually live with and contend with are (at least) threefold: first, we cannot *not divide*; second, in order to belong and to be included, we are obliged, in that same existential moment, to exclude; and third, the lines along which we divide are by no means natural, however self-evident they might appear to be at times.

I will end with a quotation from Elias (1976):

[In] discussing “racial” problems, one is apt to put the cart before the horse. It is argued, as a rule, that people perceive others as belonging to another group because the color of their skin is different. It would be more to the point if one asked how it came to pass in this world

that one has got into the habit of perceiving people with another skin color as belonging to a different group. [p. xlvii]

I hope I have begun to answer the question of how it came to pass that we have gotten into the habit of perceiving people with another skin color as belonging to a different group, and then, indeed, into the habit of treating those persons differently.

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## THE FILIAL PIETY COMPLEX: VARIATIONS ON THE OEDIPUS THEME IN CHINESE LITERATURE AND CULTURE

BY MING DONG GU, PH.D.

*The Oedipus complex is central to Western tradition, but not to Chinese culture. Occurrence of oedipal themes in Chinese literature is almost negligible. This phenomenon seems to support a contra-Freud claim: that a theory of European origin, the Oedipus complex, is not universal to human experience in non-Western cultures. However, this article suggests that powerful moral repression may cause the Oedipus complex to undergo structural transformations in some cultures. Through studying a sample of Chinese literary and film representations, the author argues that the Oedipus complex in Chinese culture has been transformed into a filial piety complex. Some conceptual issues are considered from a cross-cultural perspective.*

### ARE THERE OEDIPUSES IN CHINA?

The theory of the Oedipus complex has undergone significant changes since Freud (1900) first proposed it at the turn of the twentieth century. Radical reconceptualizations by Klein (1946), Lacan (1966, 1973), Irigaray (1974), Deleuze and Guattari (1977), Chodorow (1978), and other theorists have enriched the classical concept in dimensions unforeseen by the father of psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, the core of the concept—the effects and affects of a child's early childhood relationship with his or her parents in the formation of self and identity—has survived revolutionary recon-

ceptualizations and has continued to be seen as the basis of what Freud (1900) called “the fate of all of us” (p. 261). Since “Oedipus is part of our language in the West,” and “From Homer to Aristotle to Freud, it is the old story” (Goodhart 1978, pp. 68, 70), one noted scholar even suggests that Western humanism at large depends on it.

Nevertheless, “the Oedipus complex depends for its vindication less on empirical data than on the philosophical concept of the hermeneutic circle and on the literary power of Sophocles’ tragedy” (Rudnytsky 1987, pp. 358-359). After all, although Freud’s conception originated from his path-breaking self-analysis, well documented in his letters and writings on dreams, his fascination with oedipal themes in some masterpieces of Western literature, especially in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, gave him the inspiration and impetus to explore the mental complex, and the *Oedipus* drama provided him with a most fitting metaphor for naming and discussing its theoretical implications.

Compared with that in the West, however, the centrality of the Oedipus complex in the Chinese culture is non-existent. In contrast to the literature of other non-Western cultures (Johnson and Prince-Williams 1996), the documented presence of oedipal themes in Chinese literature, both traditional and modern, is barely present. From the late 1970s to late 1980s, there was a so-called “Freud fad” in China—an explosion of interest (both pro and con) in Freud’s theory in particular, and in psychoanalytic theory in general, among scholars of different disciplines. Numerous articles and books were devoted to the study of Chinese literature using Freudian and psychoanalytic theories (Wang 1991-1992; Yu 1987). As part of this “cultural heat,” interest in psychoanalysis continued into the early 1990s and remains strong in Chinese cultural circles today.

Oddly enough, in spite of the awesome amount of literary criticism produced, little has been reported about the existence of oedipal themes in the Chinese literary tradition. The only exceptions come from two studies, both dealing with modern literature. While one (Wang 1992) is the study of a modern drama by Cao Yu, *Thun-*

*derstorm* (1934), the other (Gu 1993) is a psychoanalytic study of a modern novella by Yu Dafu (Tafu), *Sinking* (1921). Both studies uncover oedipal structures comparable to those seen in Western literary works, but each unequivocally shows that the authors were influenced by Western writers and psychoanalytic theories.

Cao Yu admits that his dramatic composition was heavily influenced by classical Greek drama, especially the plays of Sophocles, and by the plays of Eugene O'Neill, a dramatist strongly influenced in turn by Freud. Scholars have also found a strong influence of psychoanalysis upon Yu Dafu's literary composition and criticism. The locating of such heavy external influence seems to support a contra-Freud claim: the Oedipus complex is a theory derived from the European tradition, and its universality is questionable in non-Western cultural traditions. At least, the absence of oedipal themes in premodern Chinese literature seems to reaffirm the value of Malinowski's (1929) skepticism, and to lend support to the counterstatement that the Oedipus complex is an alien theory imported into modern Chinese literature and criticism. This naturally leads us to ask: Are there Oedipuses in Chinese literature and culture?

## THE NATURE OF THE CHINESE FAMILY ROMANCE

The dust of the "Freud fad" in China has settled by now, but the Chinese situation has considerable significance, because it seems to favor cultural relativism and to cast doubt on the universality of the Oedipus complex as the "fate of all of us." I, however, suggest that the seeming absence of oedipal themes in Chinese literature, especially in premodern literature, serves only to highlight the differences between Chinese culture and its Western counterpart, and confirms the greater emotional repression in Chinese culture founded on the deeply rooted Confucian moral system.

"To say that the Oedipus complex is universal," notes one eminent analyst, "is to say that every human being is born of two progenitors, one of a sex identical to his own, the other of a different sex" (Green 1969, p. 236). Since the Chinese child, like the Western

child, is born of a father and a mother and struggles through the early years of childhood to form his or her identity in relation to the parents, the individual's psychological configuration cannot but be structured by what Freud calls the Oedipus complex in its various mental dimensions. There is, however, a basic cultural reason for the seeming nonexistence of oedipal themes in Chinese literature: it is the precociousness of Chinese culture marked by the early systematization of ethics and moral codes.

In his three-volume study on the experience of sexuality in Western society, Foucault (1976, 1984a, 1984b) demonstrates that, during the classical periods of the West, there was little prohibition on sexual pleasure, and sexual repression did not set in until a subtle but decisive break from the classical Greek vision of sexual pleasure occurred. In Chinese culture, the "secular advance of repression in the emotional life of mankind" (Freud 1900, p. 264) occurred much earlier than in the West, and became increasingly formidable until only recently.

Although Chinese and Western societies have both been primarily patriarchal, family-centered societies throughout history, the dynamics of family structure for each culture is fundamentally different. While the Western family is an individual-based entity in which each member enjoys his or her individual freedom and independence while submitting to the family interest, the Chinese counterpart is heavily collectively centered, with the expectation that every member is ready to sacrifice his or her own interest and even life for the interest of the family. Francis L. K. Hsu, an anthropologist specializing in Chinese and American cultural studies, reduces the differences between Chinese and American ways of life to two sets of contrasting variables:

First, in the American way of life the emphasis is placed upon the predilections of the individual, a characteristic we shall call *individual-centered*. This is in contrast to the emphasis the Chinese put upon an individual's appropriate place and behavior among his fellow men, a characteristic we shall term *situation-centered*. The second fundamental contrast is the prominence of emotions in the

American way of life, as compared with the tendency of the Chinese to underplay all matters of the heart. [1981, p. 12]

If we replace *American* with *Western* in the above passage, Hsu's summary of contrasts fits my study nicely. I argue that the Oedipus complex is a concept with universal significance, but that cultural differences in family structures and ways of life give rise to different ways in which oedipal themes appear in literature. In ancient China, the dominance of the Confucian ethical system—which regarded any allusion to incestuous desires as strictly taboo, and relentlessly punished any such manifestations—made it impossible for oedipal themes to find overt expression in social life and literary works. Nevertheless, Oedipus does exist in Chinese literature, but as an Oedipus disfigured. Because of moral repression, oedipal representation has been so distorted and so artfully disguised that it looks as though it does not exist.

In this article, I will explore the metamorphosis of the original oedipal configuration in selected Chinese literary works from the perspectives of the major characters in the Chinese family romance, predicated on the dynamics of moral imperatives. Although I do not presume that a psychology of literary representations may pave a royal road to the inner life of the individual's mind, I do hope to find answers to the following questions: (1) Do oedipal themes appear in traditional Chinese literary works before the coming of Western psychoanalytic theories? (2) If they do, what forms do they assume in traditional literary works? (3) Why do they assume culture-specific forms in the Chinese tradition? (4) What are the implications of the culture-specific ways in which oedipal themes are expressed in Chinese literature, in terms of arguments for or against the universality of the Oedipus complex?

I suggest that, under the crushing pressure of overwhelming repression in Chinese culture and society, the Oedipus complex in Chinese literature disintegrates and is transformed from a nuclear complex to a multiplicity of individual complexes: the father complex, the mother complex, the son complex, and the daughter complex. All of them, growing out of different individuals' re-

sponses to different family situations in a morally repressive culture, are the twisted manifestations of the original Oedipus complex.

Such fragmentation of the Oedipus complex is not unique to Chinese culture; indeed, it is equally present in Western cultures. As early as the 1910s, Rank's (1912, 1992) study had already shown how the Oedipus complex disintegrates in Western cultures, and how oedipal themes assume different forms in Western literary works. Compared with its Western counterpart, the fragmentation of the Oedipus complex occurs more drastically in Chinese culture. The Oedipus complex in Chinese culture is so fragmentary that its literary representations are far more deeply hidden than are their Western counterparts. However fragmentary and however deeply concealed, though, oedipal themes in Chinese literature are still manifestations of the original Oedipus complex. In contrast to often overt representations in Judeo-Christian cultures, oedipal themes in Chinese literature are restructured according to the dynamics of Confucian morality, taking the disguised forms of parental demands for filial piety and children's fulfillment of filial duties. For this reason, I postulate that the Oedipus complex has been transformed into a *filial piety complex* in Chinese culture.

## THE FATHER COMPLEX: FEAR OF PATRICIDE

In his "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," Freud (1908) maintains that myths, legends, and fairy tales are "distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies of whole nations, the *secular dreams* of youthful humanity" (p. 442, italics in original). The naming of the Oedipus complex originated in Freud's analysis of the Greek dramatic form of a legend, *Oedipus Rex*. The Oedipus legend is not just about a son's killing his father and marrying his mother; it also tells of the father's wish to remove the son. In the original Oedipus myth (Sophocles, 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.), it is Laius, Oedipus' father, who first attempts to kill the infant and hence sets the tragedy in motion. The attempted infanticide is instigated by a prophecy from an oracle that Oedipus will grow up to kill his father and marry his

mother. In realistic terms, the prophecy is absurd because the anticipated patricide does not exist in the unborn infant's mind; psychologically, the prophecy is a grown man's refracted fantasy, whether it is cherished by Laius, the prophet, or by the tellers of the myth. It serves as an excuse for Laius's attempted infanticide based on projection: The father views the coming child as a rival for his wife's love and wants to kill it, but he rationalizes by thinking that the child, on growing up, would kill the father.

Thus, the Oedipus legend dramatizes the father's unconscious wish to remove his son as a potential rival. Psychoanalytic research suggests that aggressive and libidinal oedipal fantasies may arise earlier and more powerfully in parents than in children, and especially in fathers rather than in sons. Zilboorg (1973), for example, argues that the myth discussed in Freud's "Totem and Taboo" (1913) demonstrates the primal father's narcissistic and sadistic motives for establishing sexual dominance over women, as well as his anxiety over the ways in which mother-child intimacy reduces his primacy. Children do not, at first, arouse feelings of tender paternality, but rather feelings of resentment at intrusion, because "there are the deep phylogenetic roots for that hostility which even the civilized father of today harbors against his own offspring. The unconscious hostility against one's own children is well nigh a universal clinical finding among men" (Zilboorg 1973, p. 123). Thus, we may as well call a father's unconscious hostility and aggressivity toward his son a *father complex*.

### *The Tale of Shun*

The Chinese nation does not have an Oedipus legend. It has one legend, however, that reveals in what manner the Chinese Oedipus complex differs from its counterpart in Western literature. In the *Shiji* or *Records of the Grand Historian* by Sima Qian (c. 145–c. 85 B.C.) of the Han dynasty, there is a tale about Shun, legendary forefather of the Chinese civilization. Shun was the very dutiful son of a blind man whose mother died when he was small. His father later remarried and gave birth to another child, named Xiang. Xiang was arrogant and selfish by nature. He conspired with his

mother to ill-treat Shun. They often spoke ill of Shun before the blind father, who, out of infatuation for his second wife, wanted to kill Shun. They plotted several times to kill Shun, but each time Shun escaped. After each murder attempt, Shun became even more dutiful and obedient, serving his father and stepmother with greater care. Still, the father wanted to get rid of him. Shun eventually married and in fact had two wives (Sima Qian 1959).

This legend sets the pattern for the Chinese representation of oedipal desires: through mechanisms of repression and distortion, parricidal and incestuous desires are transformed into a hidden fear of patricide or sublimated into a blind demand for filial piety. A later rule in the relationship between father and son in ancient Chinese society was anticipated here: "The father is the ruler of the son," and "If a father orders a son to die, the son has to die." The fear of patricide on the father's part constitutes what may be termed the *father complex*, a constellation of unconscious desires to remove the son, as revealed in the Oedipus legend. In the Chinese tale, Shun was a dutiful and obedient son; there was no reason for his father to dispose of him. But it seems that the father had the same father complex as that of Laius in the Oedipus legend. Shun's father was blind, which might suggest a symbolic loss of male potency; he was set on killing his eldest son for no reason other than his second wife's irrational wish—perhaps because he secretly nursed the fear that this son, already a married person with two wives, might take the father's own second wife.

### *A Dream of the Red Chamber*

If the oedipal motif of the father complex in the legend of Shun is only vaguely presented, it has been more fully narrated in a classic Chinese novel, *A Dream of the Red Chamber* (Cao and Gao 1791a, 1791b), also known as *The Story of the Stone* (1973, 1986) in English translations. Acknowledged as an example of the peak of premodern Chinese fiction, it shatters all the traditional ways of thinking and writing in Chinese literature (Lu 1980, p. 128). One aspect of the novel's innovation is the author's untraditional way of depicting the father-son relationship. Confucian filial piety



stipulates that a son must respect and obey his father, even if the father is not respectable. The father controls everything the son has, even his life. As a result, premodern Chinese literature is a gallery of filial sons and daughters; and literary works centering on the motif of a father-son conflict hardly exist. *A Dream of the Red Chamber*, which draws on the theme of father-son conflict, is a rare specimen that affords us an insight into the Chinese mode of the father complex.

Bao-yu, the male protagonist of *A Dream of the Red Chamber*, is born into an aristocratic family. His father, Jia Zheng, is a Confucian scholar, the epitome of Confucian morality. Like any other Chinese son of his time, Bao-yu lives anxiously in the shadow of his father. He is nevertheless pampered by his mother and paternal grandmother, who are devout Buddhists. Tyrannized by his father, who forces him to pursue the Confucian way of life, Bao-yu can always evade his oppressive father by turning to his grandmother for help. Brought up by his mother and grandmother in the midst of female cousins and maidservants, he grows up to be an unconventional person with a rebellious heart. Naturally, he comes into conflict with his father, who also clashes with his wife and mother over their dotage over Bao-yu.

Overall, the novel is structured along a triangular love relationship between Bao-yu and his two female cousins. And on another level, it narrates a second triangular conflict involving (1) the son, (2) the father, and (3) the mother and grandmother—revealing a hidden oedipal theme. If Bao-yu's love relationships with his two female cousins constitute the major theme of the novel, the second triangular conflict forms the background and determines the development of that major theme.

In the novel, the attitude of the father, Jia Zheng, toward Bao-yu is characterized by conscious infanticidal desires. From the time of Bao-yu's birth, Jia Zheng has ill feelings toward the infant, as he himself confesses: "Bao-yu came into the world with his jade, and there was always something strange about it. I knew it for an ill omen. But because his grandmother doted on him so, we nurtured him and brought him up until now" (Cao and Gao 1791b,

p. 360). His words imply that, had the grandmother not taken to the infant, Jia Zheng would have disposed of his son in some way long ago. Because of this confession, we have reason to believe that, from the day of Bao-yu's birth, his father nursed a secret desire to remove him, demonstrating that he felt the same way Laius did toward Oedipus. Thus, from the very beginning, the father-son relationship is characterized by a hidden oedipal antagonism.

At the child's first birthday celebration, Jia Zheng wants to test his son's disposition. He puts many objects in front of Bao-yu and observes which the infant picks up. The child is interested only in women's things, completely ignoring all the other objects. "Sir Zheng was displeased. He said he would grow up to be a rake, and ever since then he hasn't felt much affection for the child" (Cao and Gao 1791a, Vol. 1, p. 76). As Bao-yu grows old enough to understand human relationships, he instinctively feels that his father dislikes him. So he tries, as much as he can, to stay out of his way. When his father's presence cannot be avoided, Bao-yu is always filled with anxiety and trepidation.

The father-son conflict comes to a head in a climactic episode in which Jia Zheng literally almost kills his son. There are several precipitating incidents leading to the incident. The major factor, which infuriates Jia Zheng, is the misinformation that Bao-yu has attempted to rape his mother's maid. The maidservant reportedly resisted and Bao-yu gave her a beating. Humiliated, the maidservant committed suicide by drowning herself. But the fact is that Bao-yu had nothing to do with the girl's death. Without any investigation of the allegations, Jia Zheng flies into a rage and orders his son to be beaten to death; it seems that he has at last found an opportunity to dispose of him. Fearing any interference with his aim from his mother and wife, Jia Zheng makes sure that the door is locked, and no one is to disclose the order.

What infuriates the father most seems to have been Bao-yu's alleged attempt to rape his mother's maidservant. Thus, the father's rage betrays an oedipal fear shared by Laius toward Oedipus. Jia Zheng must have suspected that Bao-yu chose his object by way of displacement: since the mother is a fond impossibility, the maid-

servant who is close to the mother is a good substitute for that which he fears to have. It is perhaps this unconscious fantasy in Jia Zheng's mind that throws him into an uncontrollable rage and causes him to make up his mind to dispose of his son. Otherwise, it is rather unthinkable for Jia Zheng, a cool-headed, calculating Confucian scholar, to believe unproven gossip without seeking corroboration.

Throwing aside his usual benevolent demeanor of a Confucian scholar, Jia Zheng, not satisfied with the executor of his order (who, he thinks, does not hit hard enough), kicks the servant impatiently aside, wrests the bamboo stick from his hands, and, gritting his teeth, strikes his son with the utmost savagery. When his literary colleague tries to intervene, he responds by saying that he cannot wait until his son "commits parricide, or worse" (Cao and Gao 1791a, Vol. 2, p. 148). The word *parricide* reveals the true nature of Jia Zheng's unconscious fear; it is no different from Laius's fear. The worst of Jia Zheng's fears may relate to the boy's incestuous desires, which find support in the father's strong reaction to his wife's appearance and pleading: "Her entry provoked Jia Zheng to fresh transports of fury. Faster and harder fell the bamboo on the prostrate form of Bao-yu, which by now appeared to be unconscious" (Cao and Gao 1791a, Vol. 2, p. 149). Thus, Jia Zheng is very angry at his wife's interference with his purpose. The beating with renewed savagery may have been prompted by his recollection of his wife's pampering of his son, but it may also have been provoked by the father's oedipal jealousy.

Up to now, the narration bears a close resemblance to Laius's attempted infanticide. The difference is that Laius wants to kill Oedipus in his infancy, whereas Jia Zheng nurses the idea at Bao-yu's birth and wants to kill the boy in his adolescence. It is worth noting that all in the family agree that Jia Zheng has overdone his disciplinary job as a father. Even if Bao-yu had done something wrong, even if he had raped the maidservant, he should not have incurred such a savage beating, still less a threat to his life. After all, who among the male members of this official family does not sometimes indulge in illicit sensual pleasure? Jia Zheng's overre-

action to an alleged rape testifies to his oedipal hostility toward his son.

## THE MOTHER COMPLEX: INSANE JEALOUSY

Feminist theorists have argued that the Freudian model of the Oedipus complex is based on findings solely from the male perspective and leaves the female perspective almost untouched. Indeed, scholars have yet to fully appreciate the implications of Sophocles' play from Jocasta's perspective. In my view, her hasty marriage to Oedipus is determined not so much by the latter's success in solving the Sphinx's riddle as by her need to fill the emotional and spiritual vacuum left by the dual disappearance of her son and husband. In psychoanalytic terms, Chodorow (1978) addresses this need:

That women turn to children to fulfill emotional and even erotic desires unmet by men or other women means that a mother expects from infants what only another adult should be expected to give. These tendencies take different forms with sons and daughters. Sons may become substitutes for husbands, and must engage in defensive assertion of ego boundaries and repression of emotional needs. [pp. 211-212]

This need on the mother's part may develop into instinctual antipathy to the son's wife and conscious or unconscious strivings to remove the wife so as to repossess the son. This is a common theme in Chinese literature, and bears a striking similarity to a motif in D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913). Anyone who has read the English novel has an indelible impression of Mrs. Morel as an excessively possessive mother. The possessive motherhood Lawrence described with insight and thoroughness has long been a subject of Chinese literature, and, again, it asserts its mark as a demand for filial piety.

*"The Peacock Southeast Flew" and the Story of Lu You*

As early as the early third century A.D., a long poem called "The Peacock Southeast Flew"—one of the most famous Chinese poems

—narrated the tragic story of a jealous mother who compelled her son to divorce his wife, driving both of them to their deaths (Mair 1994, pp. 462-472). The poem was said to be based on a real tragedy, and thus has a special significance for understanding ancient Chinese family relations. Previously, critics' attention has been solely focused on the poem's social significance. No one seems to have examined the poem more deeply than its manifest content.

It seems to me that the poem touches on the same theme of possessive motherhood so profoundly depicted in Lawrence's novel. The poem does not tell us much about the male protagonist's father; instead, the family is completely under the control of the mother, who regards her authority as unassailable. The young man and his wife are devoted to each other, and their marriage is happy in every sense of the word. The daughter-in-law is beautiful, virtuous, and diligent, and tries as hard as she can to please the mother-in-law. But the latter is simply dissatisfied with her, deliberately finding fault with her without cause. Unable to bear the abominable treatment, the daughter-in-law eventually asks to be divorced.

In ancient China, it was a great disgrace for both the woman and her family if a daughter were to be divorced and sent home. Many a woman would rather endure ill treatment, and even torture, than be sent away. But in this poem, the woman, fully realizing the grave consequence of her action, insists on being sent home. This seems to suggest that she must have realized the impossibility of coexisting with her possessive mother-in-law. The son begs his mother not to drive his wife away, threatening to remain single all his life as a consequence. The mother becomes angry and resorts to the demands of filial piety to overcome his resistance: "My son, have you no respect?/ How dare you speak in your wife's defense!/ I have lost all feeling for you,/ On no account will I let you disobey me!" (Mair 1994, p. 464). Finally, the son commits suicide. Perhaps his action is an indication of his awareness that even if he gets another wife, as his mother promises, his married life would again end in tragedy because of his mother's insane possessiveness.

About nine hundred years later, the tragedy of "The Peacock Southeast Flew" was repeated in a similar incarnation. Chinese lit-

erary history has it that, in the twelfth century A.D., Lu You (1125-1220), a famous poet in the southern Song dynasty, literally lived through the tragic experience described in the ancient poem. At the age of twenty, he married his cousin. Like Lu's family, the cousin's family was also famous and prosperous. The bride was beautiful and virtuous, like the wife in "The Peacock Southeast Flew," and, moreover, she was intelligent, herself a poetess. As a relative and daughter from an official family, she was an ideal choice for the poet in terms of tradition and compatibility. The marriage was indeed a perfect match, for the couple loved each other with devotion. But, due to interference from the poet's mother, Lu had to divorce his wife and marry another woman. The divorced wife later died of a broken heart, thus reenacting the tragedy of "The Peacock Southeast Flew."

Since the marriage was described as a perfect match, Chinese literary scholars have long wondered why it should have met with disapproval from the husband's mother. One reason, according to a contemporary poet, is that the mother feared that the wife's love would distract her son from his study (Qi 1985, p. 15). But this has not convinced scholars, because Lu You had been a diligent student since childhood. His new wife would in no way distract him from his study; on the contrary, since she was a poetess well versed in Chinese classics, she would likely be a help rather than a hindrance.

According to history, after their divorce, the two happened to meet each other while touring a garden. The poet was so aggrieved that he wrote a poem on the wall, in which he blamed his mother for their separation. His ex-wife soon died of grief after this chance meeting. After her death, the poet sank even deeper into sorrow; the tragedy remained an unhealed scar in his heart. In later life, he wrote many poems in memory of their short-lived married life, secretly condemning his mother's tyrannical meddling. One of his poems bears a striking similarity to "The Peacock Southeast Flew" in its description of the wife's diligence, virtue, filial piety, and eagerness to please her mother-in-law, and in her ultimate fate of being sent home in disgrace (Liu and Yucheng Lo 1975). In the poem,

the poet explicitly expressed his protest against the mother's tyranny through the mouth of a water bird: "Madam is cruel!"

*The Golden Cangue*

If the two mothers described in the above discussion heavily disguise their intention to possess their sons under the pretext of filial piety, another mother in a novelette, *The Golden Cangue*, by Eileen Chang (1942), scarcely attempts to cover up her possessiveness. This novella is a sophisticated exploration of feminine psychology, and comes even closer to Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* in its characterization of possessive motherhood. Ch'i-ch'iao, the mother in the story, motivated by insane jealousy, persecutes her daughter-in-law to her death. She has not thought of finding a wife for her son until he begins to frequent brothels. Then, she adopts a hostile attitude toward her son's wife from the first day of their marriage; even at their wedding, she scarcely covers up her jealousy of her daughter-in-law: "I can't say much in front of young ladies—just hope our Master Pai won't die in her hands" (Chang 1942, p. 548).

Such remarks carry an undertone of sexual possessiveness, implying that the mother feels forced to give up her son. From that point on, she begins to work methodically and ingenuously to get rid of her daughter-in-law, so as to wrest her son back. She acts like the two mothers discussed earlier, trying to carp at the daughter-in-law without cause. She humiliates her by making allusions in public to her daughter-in-law's supposed indulgence in sex: "Our new young mistress may look innocent—but as soon as she sees Master Pai, she has to go and sit on the night stool. Really! It sounds unbelievable, doesn't it?" (Chang 1942, p. 549). These remarks show how abnormally concerned she is with her son's sex life.

Moreover, she induces her son through taunts and exhortations of filial piety to leave his wife's bed. She forces him to sit with her on the opium couch all night long, extricating secrets about her daughter-in-law's sex life. Later, she would make known to her relatives, including the girl's mother, those personal secrets,

always adding some touches of her own imagination. To further humiliate the wife, she gives her son a concubine.

All this is done by the mother for the sole purpose of removing her rival, the daughter-in-law. As time goes by, both wife and concubine break down under her unbearable mistreatment. One dies of a broken heart; the other commits suicide. Her son does not dare to marry again, knowing full well that his mother would not tolerate it, and instead goes whoring from time to time.

My brief analysis of the mother in this story shows that she is not just a malevolent woman out of her mind. Her insane jealousy of her son's wife and concubine is more than a manifestation of her inability to tolerate the normal sexual lives of those around her due to her own frustration. It is a disguised move to repossess her son sexually as an emotional compensation for her lack of a sex life. In one episode, when she forces her son to leave his wife one night and to accompany her to the opium couch, we find the following description:

All these years he had been the only man in her life. Only with him there was no danger of his being after her money—it was his anyway. But as her son, he amounted to less than half a man. And even the half she could not keep now that he was married. And she puts a foot on his shoulder and keeps giving him light kicks on the neck, whispering, “Unfilial slave, I’ll fix you! When did you get to be so unfilial?” [Chang 1942, p. 549]

The flirtatious gestures, the coquettish banter, the recollection of the mother's sexual frustration in early life, and the mother and son's spending the whole night together on the opium couch—all these details carry a sexual undertone, which is difficult to discount. Of course, the mother's attempt to possess her son sexually is covered up under the smoke screen of filial piety. This is a central point, which differentiates Ch'i-ch'iao from Mrs. Morel, and distinguishes the mother complex in Chinese literature from that in Western literature.



## THE SON COMPLEX: FULFILLMENT OF FILIAL DUTIES

In ancient Chinese society, a father's conscious desire to dispose of his son might be justified by the Confucian requirement of filial piety, whereas a son's desire, even an unconscious striving to remove the father and possess the mother, was viewed with absolute horror. Hence, in Chinese literature, a son's oedipal feeling is channeled into other avenues and assumes the form of profound longing for a woman who has a mother stature or is a surrogate mother or an aunt.

### *The Novella Fuxi Fuxi and the Film Judou*

If patricide appears in a Chinese literary work, it is committed either because of mistaken identity or because of social or moral imperative. There are quite a few cases of this in modern and contemporary Chinese literature. A notable one is found in a 1988 novella by Liu Heng, *Fuxi Fuxi* (translated into English three years later as *The Obsessed*), adapted by the internationally renowned film director Zhang Yimou into a film, *Judou* (1990), which received an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film in 1991 and won a handful of international film awards.

In the novella, Yang Jinshan is a childless and impotent man in his late fifties who raises his nephew, Yang Tianqing, now in his early twenties, as his farmhand. Tianqing falls in love with his aunt, Wang Judou, a woman in her mid-twenties. Although she is the wife of Jinshan, she and Tianqing begin a secret love life. The uncle/husband becomes the obstacle to their love. Tianqing wants to kill his uncle, but each time he thinks of acting on this desire, his sense of filial piety stops him short.

The secret love results in the birth of a male child, Tianbai, who grows up to learn of the lovers' clandestine life together. Tianbai hates his natural father, Tianqing, and refuses to accept him, even after he comes to know his true origin, because he feels duty-bound to his father in name, Jinshan. He beats his real father

and attempts to kill him, but he does not follow through on his patricidal impulse. Unable to bear the social pressures and mental sufferings, Tianqing commits suicide. Only after his death does his son seem to show a sign of remorse and reconciliation (Liu 1991). There is certainly an oedipal motif in the novella, but it does not develop into a full-blown oedipal conflict.

In the film adaptation, however, the oedipal theme is intensified into a full oedipal conflict that consumes the lives of three generations. In the end of the movie, Tianqing's illegitimate son, born of his secret love relation with his aunt, commits a double patricide: he kills both his biological father and his father in name. Rew Chow (1995) correctly observes that "Zhang introduces a significant number of changes in the Judou story in order to enhance the Oedipalist focus on femininity"; thus, the adaptation "makes full use of the modernist conceptual method that many have called, after Freud, *Oedipalization*" (pp. 147-148). This intensified oedipalization may have been sparked by the "Freud fad" and its impact upon contemporary Chinese literature and cinema.

But even in this modern film adaptation of the original story, filial piety shapes the development and outcome of oedipal conflicts. Tianqing and his aunt at first hide their love; they begin to live as man and wife only after Tianqing's uncle becomes a cripple. While their child is growing up, Tianqing attempts to get rid of his uncle several times, but each time, he stops short of killing him because of his filial scruples. Ironically, his natural son grows up to be a filial son to his father in name, not to his biological father. The crippled uncle wants to kill his illegitimate "son" while he is still small; he tries to do so a couple of times in vain. One day, he again attempts to push the child into a water tank. But the child, who has not been able to speak thus far in his life, suddenly opens his mouth and calls him "Dad." Now the old man finds in the boy's filial piety a most effective weapon to fight back against the couple who have betrayed him. He asserts his right as the "father" of the child and uses the child to make life miserable for the young couple. Under his tutelage, the child grows up to hate his biological father, and starts to persecute the latter as soon as he is capable of doing so.

After the uncle makes deliberate efforts to inculcate in the child the idea that he himself is the boy's father, the oedipal hostility becomes enmeshed in the social dynamics of filial piety. Now the child can justify persecution of his real father under the pretext of filial duties. There is an episode in which the child chases a young man in the village, determined to kill him because the latter gossips about his mother having an affair with his biological father; he nearly commits murder in defense of the family honor. This episode adds a social dimension to the already complicated picture of the oedipal conflict, and determines that the real father and son will never be able to reconcile.

Tragically, when the child is about five years old, he accidentally trips Jinshan, the old uncle, into the dyeing pool of the family's dye-workshop, drowning him. After the uncle dies, Tianqing is no longer permitted to live in the same house. The film shows that, each evening, when Tianqing finishes his day's work at the house, his son callously drives him away. The image of the son who locks the door against his real father implicitly hints at an oedipal jealousy that motivates the child to guard the mother against the father. Tianqing tries to endear himself to the child, but is repeatedly coldly rebuffed. When the child grows to be an adolescent with sufficient physical strength, he knocks his real father to the ground on one occasion when the latter tries to soothe the son's wounded finger.

The film does not tell us clearly why the child persecutes his biological father and eventually kills the latter, even after he learns about the identity of his victim. A little psychoanalytically oriented reflection may throw light on the cause and show how intricately an individual's emotional life is enmeshed in the social fabric of family honor and filial piety. When the boy is about five years old, the film shows that he starts to resent his mother's liaison with his biological father. There is one episode in which, while his real father is having a tryst with his mother behind a closed door, he throws stones at the door, thereby disrupting their romantic interlude. At this time, the child is still too young to understand the concept of filial piety, but he has reached the oedi-

pal stage of child development. His hatred toward his real father and resentment of his mother's liaison with this man seems to be determined by oedipal feelings.

*Judou* is a rare artistic representation of oedipal conflict in Chinese culture and reveals the complexity of Chinese oedipal configurations. It dramatizes two oedipal triangles among three generations, with two cases of patricide. While one patricide is perpetrated unconsciously and unintentionally, the other is committed consciously and deliberately. A close analysis of the two patricides reveals something interesting. In both cases, the two fathers die at the hands of the child and in the family's dyeing pool. As noted, in the first patricide, the son accidentally trips Jinshan into a pool, causing him to drown. In the second patricide, the child, now an adolescent, throws his biological father, who has fainted, into the same pool. When his father comes to and grabs onto a pole to save himself, the adolescent ferociously hits his father with a big stick, causing him to drown. In my opinion, the son ends up killing his real father partly in the name of fulfilling his filial duty as a son to the man who functioned as his father, and partly because of his hidden oedipal hostility.

Thus, in the end, even after the mother has disclosed in unequivocal terms who his real father is, the son cool-headedly kills his biological father amidst the frenzied pleading of his mother. Distraught, the mother sets fire to the place and burns herself to death in the fire. The film ends in total destruction and tragedy.

The son's reactions to the deaths of his two fathers are portrayed differently. In the first case, when he sees the old man struggling for life in the pool, he jumps up joyfully and claps his hands, as though he were watching something funny. A common-sense explanation for this behavior would be that the child did not know what he was doing or what consequences would come out of the accident. But a psychoanalytic reading might interpret the child's joy at the death of the old man as a representation of the child's unconscious wish for the removal of the father.

In the second case of patricide, the adolescent clearly knows that he is committing a murder. While he goes about killing his

father, his face shows no expression. This lack of expression may suggest that he is committing a patricide quite against his will, but in conformity with his filial duties to the man who served as his father. In both cases, the cinematographic use of the dyeing pool as the death scene is not made simply for visual effects. The red-colored water sloshing turbulently about in the pool while the second dying man struggles for life not only symbolizes an uncontrollable eruption of oedipal hatred, but also hints at the bloody, violent nature of oedipal conflict.

\* \* \* \* \*

In traditional Chinese literature, rarely do we find such violent, full-blown oedipal conflicts in a literary work, and still less often do oedipal patricides occur. As a rule, one dimension of the Oedipus complex—the hatred of the father—disappears, while the other dimension—the love for the mother, or a surrogate mother—is intensified. Bao-yu, the male protagonist of *A Dream of the Red Chamber*, discussed above, is a case in point.

According to psychoanalytic theory, a successful resolution of the Oedipus complex should enable a male to transfer his love for the mother to a different person of the opposite sex outside the family, thus bringing about the confluence of the affectionate and sensual currents in the psyche. The affectionate current is formed on the basis of the self-preservative instinct and is directed to members of the family and to those who look after the child. From the outset, it carries along with it contributions from the sexual instinct—components of erotic interest. It corresponds to the child's primary object choice. It persists throughout childhood and throughout life. Then, at the onset of puberty, it is joined by the powerful sensual current, which has as its aim genital contact.

Normal people are able to find another person of the opposite sex with whom the affectionate and sensual currents can be united, but in Bao-yu's case, his upbringing has turned him into an abnormal person. A child is usually nursed by one caretaker, his mother. But several female persons nursed Bao-yu. His biological mother, Madame Wang, who does not attend to Bao-yu's nursing

and upbringing personally, is not as closely related to him as are other female figures. To a great extent, these female figures assume the maternal role of Madame Wang. Above all, his eldest sister, Yuan-chun, plays the role of his mother. As the novel tells us: "Although they were brother and sister, *their relationship was more like that of a mother and her son*" (Cao and Gao 1791a, Vol. 1, p. 358, italics added).

This pseudomother-son relationship is further corroborated by Yuan-chun's letter home. The tone of her letter is one of motherly love, rather than sisterly love. When Bao-yu is led to her on her visit home, Yuan-chun, "stretching out her arms, drew him to her bosom where she held him in a close embrace, stroking his hair and fondling the back of his neck" (Cao and Gao 1791a, Vol. 1, p. 363). Pleased to hear that Bao-yu can compose verses, she asks him to write an octet for each of the four places in the garden that she likes best.

In the first poem, the whole tenor is one of waiting, expecting, and longing, characterizing the feelings of anxiety lest the slumberer's dream be disrupted by violent intrusion. In the second poem, there is a literary allusion. The mention of "grass at spring" (*san chun cao*) alludes to the Tang poet Meng Jiao's "A Departing Son's Lament": "Who would say that a small grass's longing/could requite the radiance of spring" (Jin 1980, p. 50). Meng Jiao's poem describes a son's profound gratitude to his mother and his inability to repay her kindness. Bao-yu's use of the allusion betrays the surrogate mother stature of his sister in his mind.

Of the four poems, three are composed by Bao-yu and the fourth by Dai-yu, a female cousin. Bao-yu's poem contrasts with Dai-yu's in tone and mood: the former is dominated by melancholic depression and anxious expectancy, while the latter is characterized by a joyful jubilation and carefree nonchalance. Perhaps Bao-yu expresses his unconscious desire to repay his sister for her kindness in nursing and upbringing. Thus, Bao-yu's emotional complex is also connected to the dynamics of filial piety.

## THE DAUGHTER COMPLEX: BLIND LOYALTY TO FATHER

### *"Autumn"*

In Chinese literature, the female counterpart of the Oedipus complex often takes the form of a daughter's profound longing for her father or a blind loyalty to his image. A typical example is to be found in Yeh Shao-chun's story, "Autumn" (1932). It has a hidden oedipal motif similar to that in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1954). Miss Emily is an old spinster whose oedipal attachment to her father turns her into an odd person, capable of what are normally considered human follies and perversions. In Yeh Shao-chun's story, we also encounter a spinster whose unconventional behavior is considered odd by her relatives and contemporaries. Like Miss Emily, she is the daughter of an old, once-prosperous family. Her father died when she was twenty-one, leaving behind a large estate for his several children to share among themselves. As it is the traditional Chinese way for grown-up children to live in an extended-family arrangement, under one roof, the estate provides a spiritual and emotional haven for the female protagonist. Unlike Miss Emily, she is a modern woman who seems to come under the sway of women's liberation. She chooses to study obstetrics and becomes an obstetrician in Shanghai. Hers is an arduous job, and she faces strong competition from quacks. Though she realizes this, she sticks to her profession and decides to remain single for life.

The story opens with the protagonist's return home to attend the annual family reunion on the occasion of sweeping her parents' graves. She lies in bed in her own room, overhearing two maidservants talking disparagingly about her and her profession. Imagining the contempt on the servants' faces, the protagonist does not feel angry, for the old maidservants only render in words the disparagement she has often encountered. But their remarks about her age make her feel somewhat upset, for she is nearly

forty; in ten years' time, she will no longer be fit to do her job. She is worried about her future as a spinster.

Her sister-in-law seizes the opportunity to persuade her to accept a proposal of marriage, a match quite ideal in the conventional sense. But the effort is unwelcome and made in vain. The protagonist's refusal is puzzling not only to her relatives, but also to the reader. A superficial reason is offered: Having seen the travail of childbirth endured by so many women, she does not want to experience the same ordeal, especially at her age. This explanation, however, is self-defeating. We are told that the man meant for her is a widower who does not wish to have more children, because his own have already reached adulthood. She has a strong maternal instinct, for her thoughts about being a mother "made her feel as warm inside, as if she had drunk some wine or heard herself respectfully addressed as 'Madam' or 'Mistress'" (Yeh Shao-chun 1932, p. 120).

The protagonist is not an asexual female with no interest in marriage. When matchmakers come with other proposed marriages, she ostensibly adopts the perspective of a disinterested bystander, but, in her heart, there is "a bubbling cauldron in which satisfaction and jealousy were churning in a turbulent mix" (p. 119). Her nonchalance and disinterestedness are only feigned. The image of a "bubbling cauldron" indicates that there is an intense internal conflict deep within her psyche. She is even willing to ask probing questions about the proposed marriage, betraying her desire for married life. She feels satisfied because the talk about matrimony enables her to imagine the fulfillment of her desires; yet she feels jealous because marriage is something beyond her reach due to some unknown inhibition. She has to be content with this kind of talk in the same way that a sexually starved person has to make do with sexual talk.

The ambivalence in the story makes it difficult to pin down its central theme. C. T. Hsia (1961) suggests that the story is a "study in loneliness" (p. 67). This perhaps accounts for one aspect of the story, but certainly cannot explain why the protagonist refuses to marry. My close reading of the story convinces me that it has a



similar oedipal theme to Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily": It is the woman's unconscious wish to be loyal to her father that incapacitates her to pursue love or even the contemplation of marriage. What is her inhibition against matrimony? The story provides us with a casual hint that, examined in terms of the Oedipus complex, offers an explanation: "When she was twenty-seven or twenty-eight, she decided not to marry, since her father's will stipulated that any daughter who remained a spinster should receive twenty *mou* of land" (Yeh Shao-chun 1932, p. 118).

An unsuspecting reader might interpret the father's will as a measure of precaution against a rainy day. But there are two possible hidden motives. Either her father had realized that his daughter had an inhibition against marriage, or he was unconsciously encouraging his daughter to remain single. Either is plausible. In any case, his daughter takes the terms in the will literally as a reason for not considering matrimonial matters. By observing her father's will literally, she proves herself to be a filial daughter. To her, the estate left by her father has a symbolic stature, and is in many ways a symbol of her father's existence. As long as it is intact, she can always come home for spiritual sustenance and be reinvigorated by her father's legacy, despite her psychological and physical frustrations. This explains why she feels so devastated by and antagonistic toward the idea of selling the family property.

With regard to the means of coping with her psychological conflict, the story shows a different feature from "A Rose for Emily" (1954). In Faulkner's story, Miss Emily manages to solve her problem by murdering her lover and placing him in her bed, so that she can sleep with him in the same bed while still remaining faithful to her father. In the Chinese story, the woman has a normal desire for motherhood, which cannot be fulfilled unless she consents to marriage. She succeeds in solving her dilemma by a process of transformation and an act of sublimation. Due to her inhibition against marriage, she cannot perform the maternal function. She chooses the study of obstetrics quite late; it is reasonable to believe that her belated decision is a way of transforming her repressed maternal desires.

The profession of obstetrician was not a highly regarded job for a woman at that time: it was considered disgusting, low-class, and even embarrassing. In this sense, the protagonist has made a big sacrifice. Her repressed desire for motherhood is sublimated through her choice of profession. The job is particularly satisfying to her for psychological reasons. Otherwise, we cannot understand how she can make such a "sacrifice" and stick to it despite all the odds against this. The hidden satisfaction seems to be that, if she cannot perform the maternal function, she would like to help other women perform it. Delivering children into the world becomes equivalent to having children herself. Since she cannot have both of these conflicting options, she has to be content with a compromise solution.

## CONCLUSION: A FILIAL PIETY COMPLEX

In his study of the Oedipus complex, Fenichel (1931) acknowledged the assumption that the phenomenon might have a phylogenetic root, and that even children who are not brought up in a family have an Oedipus complex because they are not free from family influences in society. He nevertheless emphasized the impact of culture, especially family structure, upon the specific forms of the complex. In his opinion, the forms of the complex change in accordance with the changing conditions of family structure.

My study confirms Fenichel's observations and insights. Both China and the West have been patriarchal, family-centered societies. The difference in emphasis on the role of the family determines the different forms of the Oedipus complex in Chinese and Western societies. The Confucian moral system produced perhaps the most systematic moral codes in the world concerning the family and an individual's behavior within it. In a traditional Chinese family, the Confucian moral codes ensure an early identification of children with their social roles. From early childhood, Chinese children learn their proper places in the family and society and act accordingly.

Nowadays, most psychoanalysts no longer expect the Oedipus complex to be fully resolved during childhood development, but believe that its effects do not necessarily adversely affect a healthy adult life. Analogously, if oedipal feelings in Chinese children remain strong into adulthood, such feelings are rigorously suppressed, by a strong sense of horror, into the deepest recesses of the mind.

My study has shown that, in contrast to their presence in Western literature, oedipal conflicts with the complete paraphernalia of Sophocles' drama are rare in Chinese literature. Still rarer is the representation of overt erotic attachment to a parent of the opposite sex. My analysis of Chinese works shows that oedipal feelings are always displaced onto objects having similar qualities or disguised as manifestations of unusual behavior. For this reason, we may call the Oedipus complex in Chinese culture a *muted complex*. To make the situation more complicated, this muted complex is fragmented. A classic oedipal situation constitutes a triangular relationship involving father, mother, and son. In a muted oedipal situation, the oedipal relationship may be a conflict between father and son; a triangular conflict involving mother, son, and son's wife; a son's insatiable longing for maternal love; a daughter's incomprehensible inhibition against love and marriage; or a man or boy's erotic love for an aunt, stepmother, or even mother's maid. In this sense, Guntrip's (1961) term *family complex* may be an appropriate epithet for the Chinese form of the Oedipus complex.

In his study of cultural manifestations in Western literary texts, Fredric Jameson (1986) identifies "a radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power" (p. 69). He simplifies this split into one between Freud and Marx, or between the private and public spheres. In my study of the oedipal themes in Chinese lit-

erature, that split does not seem to exist. Instead, my analysis demonstrates how the private is intricately intertwined with the public; libido is inseparably attached to morality; and personal fulfillment is bound with family interest.

The film *Judou*, in particular, is a profound representation of how a Chinese man's oedipal feelings are intricately enmeshed in the public manifestations of love, loyalty, family honor, and filial piety. In all the Chinese works that I have analyzed, oedipal desires are related to parental demands for filial piety or children's fulfillment of filial duties. Since the moral dynamics of filial piety have exerted such a profoundly shaping impact on oedipal themes in Chinese literature, we may appropriately refer to the Oedipus complex in Chinese culture as a *filial piety complex*.

### *Some Afterthoughts*

I hope that my study may provide a convincing case against the contra-Freudian view that, because the oedipal complex is unique to Western culture, its theory is ethnocentric and cannot be considered universal to human experience. My uncovering of oedipal wishes and structures in premodern literary work, untouched by the introduction of psychoanalytic theories from the West, causes me to observe that Western psychoanalytic theories may have contributed to the advent of more open representations of oedipal themes in modern Chinese literature, but that these representations do not lend support to the claim that all oedipal themes in Chinese literature arise from the importation of Western theories.

A careful reader of this article may notice that, although there is a dazzling variety of oedipal themes portrayed in Chinese literary works, there is hardly any positive Oedipus, as in Sophocles' drama. This observation necessitates a follow-up and some afterthoughts from a conceptual perspective.

The manifest oedipal themes in the literary works that I have analyzed are less abstract, less general, and less inferential, but more colorful and more multifaceted, than is the original Oedi-

pus legend in Sophocles' Oedipus drama. This seems to suggest that the Oedipus complex might not be an inflexible, abstract, general concept, but may be an inclusive organizing principle that arises from the inevitability of any child's coming into and growing up in a world where there are differences in gender and generation. Thus, it may comprise a series of organizing schemata with which children consciously and unconsciously structure their emotional life and construct their self-identities in a family setting, in relation to the moral codes of a society.

On the conceptual level, we may view oedipal structure as a generalized principle that has universal applicability, but what we deal with in real life and in literary works is always an example of its particular and unique expression in individual cases. At a descriptive level, the expression of underlying oedipal conflicts is specific to each individual and to each culture. In a particular culture, certain aspects of the oedipal conflicts as observed by Freud and other theorists in the West may be suppressed into the deep unconscious, or displaced onto seemingly innocuous materials, or distorted into forms that we normally do not associate with the original Oedipus complex. For example, in my study of Yu Dafu's (Yu Tafu's) *Sinking*, "A Chinese Oedipus in Exile" (Gu 1993), the male protagonist's love for his mother is transformed into erotic desires for older women (p. 12) and a profound love for Mother Nature and his motherland (pp. 6-9, 16-18).

Zhang Yimou's adaptation of Liu Heng's (1991) novella into the film *Judou* (1990) is a good example to illustrate that certain motifs are forbidden subjects and must be avoided in an oedipal representation. In an interview about his film production (Ye 1999), Zhang vigorously denied a film critic's comment that *Judou* is a film about incest. According to him, in the original novella, Yang Tianqing was Yang Jinshan's biological nephew, but in Zhang's cinematic adaptation, Tianqing's identity was deliberately changed such that he was the old man's *adopted* nephew, so as to distance the film from the theme of true incest. Zhang accepted the interviewer's observation that *Judou*, the protago-

nist's aunt, does not start to have an affair with Tianqing until after she finds out that he has no blood relationship to her husband (Ye 1999). Zhang's acceptance here points to an insight that I have observed in my previous analysis of the Chinese literature: erotic desires for a parent of the opposite sex constitute a taboo and are horrifying for men as well as women. Ironically, in Zhang's adaptation, the faint oedipal motif present in the novella is intensified into a full oedipal conflict with a double patricide.

Cao Yu's play, *Thunderstorm* (1934), mentioned earlier in this article, is another apt example illustrating the taboo in oedipal representation. Among Chinese dramatic works, this play may be the one that comes closest to Sophocles' *Oedipus* in oedipal structure and elements: abandonment, mistaken identity, father-son conflict, attempted patricide, mother-son incest, sibling incest, and deaths arising from some of these. Nevertheless, there is one fundamental difference: the mother-son incest is not between biological mother and son. The male protagonist has an erotic relationship not with his natural mother, but with his stepmother.

This important distinction characterizes all Chinese literary works with oedipal themes that I have read. And, almost without exception, the outcome of oedipal development is determined by the moral dynamics of filial piety or social responsibility. The overdetermination of oedipal themes by the Chinese cultural imperative of filial piety leads to the most important insight that my study has uncovered: that the abhorrence for and the defenses against oedipal wishes will invariably determine culture-specific ways in which oedipal themes are expressed in the literature of a given culture. This insight may help us better understand the complexity of the Oedipus complex, which has fascinated scholars and analysts and will continue to do so for generations to come.

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<sup>1</sup> *Managing Editor's Note*: At the author's request, some of the Chinese names in this article have been handled according to Sinological practice, that is, with the surname followed by the first name in the text of the article, and alphabetized in the reference list below by the surname. This applies to the following names in the text: Cao Yu (which, for example, appears in the reference list entry as *Cao, Y.*), Liu Heng, Sima Qian, Yeh Shao-chun, and Yu Dafu (Tafu).

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<sup>2</sup> Today, this name is more commonly translated as *Yu Dafu*, according to the pinyin notation system, rather than *Yu Tafu*, the name under which it was originally published.

## RACISM AS A TRANSFERENCE STATE: EPISODES OF RACIAL HOSTILITY IN THE PSYCHOANALYTIC CONTEXT

BY FORREST M. HAMER, PH.D.

*Episodes of racial prejudice emerging in the context of a psychoanalytic therapy suggest that racism can be thought of as a regressed state of transference, characterized by polarized representations of self and other, categorical thinking, and the predominance of splitting and projection as defenses. The author suggests that activation of racial hostility in the clinical situation occurs as a result of events and processes not atypical in an analytic process. Though such states occurring outside of the analytic context are more likely made conscious in certain situations and in certain persons, the author suggests that racism can be more generally described as an ever-potential state of mind for most people living in racialized contexts.*

What does it mean to be racist? What is the configuration of cognitions, affects, defenses, and object relations that characterize racist attitudes, racist feelings, and/or racist behavior? What difference is there between conscious and unconscious racism? Are some people racist but not others, or do all persons hold the potential in certain circumstances to develop or express racist attitudes and behavior? And how do experiences of conscious racism emerging in the clinical context contribute to our understanding of these questions?

I'd like to join the consideration of these questions through the discussion of three episodes from my own clinical practice wherein

racist feelings and thoughts held by patients were generally conscious and available for psychoanalytic exploration. These vignettes join in turn with other reported cases in the clinical literature to emphasize that racial prejudice can be viewed as an ever-potential state of mind, both inside and outside the clinical situation. This state of mind implicates a broad transference context that is simultaneously intrapsychic, interpersonal, and societal.

## BRIEF CASE EXAMPLES

### *Vignette 1*

Ms. N, a white woman in her late forties who had entered a once-weekly psychotherapy for depression, obtained some initial relief from her distress over the course of several weeks. After several months of deepening work, during which time I suggested that we consider meeting more frequently, she acknowledged concern about recent feelings of irrational hatred she had begun to feel toward people she identified as being of ethnic Chinese descent. She was ashamed of these feelings, and uncomfortable speaking about them with me, a black American man, for she judged such feelings negatively when they were uttered or enacted by others, and she did not wish to be judged badly. Yet, she noticed that when she encountered apparently Chinese persons, she found herself quite critical of some aspect of them that she knew did not bother her in other people. Moreover, she recognized that her racist feelings were confined to ethnic Chinese (not even toward others whom she believed to be from another Asian ethnic group), and that they had an almost compulsive quality.

It was not initially clear between us what to make of these feelings—it was not immediately apparent that their theme was an elaboration of previously discussed material (though its relation to the idea of her coming to treatment more frequently was of interest to me); nor was it clear on direct inquiry that its emergence was even related to her learning that a new office mate of mine had a Chinese surname. Yet, a pivotal question in the exploration over several sessions turned out to be: “Which Chinese people have

you noticed yourself feeling hateful toward?”—for this question led Ms. N to reflect on a relationship with a good friend that had ended during the period of intense depression leading up to her entering treatment. That years-long friendship with a Chinese American woman had become disrupted when the patient felt briefly suicidal and turned to her for support, and the friend had apparently felt overwhelmed by anxiety about how to be helpful. Too, the friend had been offered a job in another country, and was considering such a move at the time the patient felt she needed her most. They had not spoken to each other for over a year.

That she was mourning the loss of the friendship surprised Ms. N, who was consciously only resentful about feeling abandoned. Further exploration led to a discussion of other such important disappointments in her history, among them disappointments at the hands of parents and other adults whom she felt she had often overwhelmed as an emotionally intense child. Not surprisingly, she became aware of a fear of similarly overwhelming me; she then considered more meaningfully the possibility that her hostility had also come up in relation to fantasies she could then explore about my presumed relationship with my office mate, as well as ambivalent feelings toward me that emerged with anxiety over possibly coming in more frequently. Though we would go on to explore these transference fantasies more deeply, Ms. N would later mention that the experience of quickly and dramatically recognizing her mourning for her friend lessened her hateful feelings toward anonymous Chinese people.

### *Vignette 2*

Mr. M, a black man in his later thirties, said at one point early in his face-to-face, twice-weekly psychotherapy, “Sometimes I just hate white people, you know?” When I came to ask which white people he found himself hating, he talked more generally about those American whites whom he saw as oblivious to their privilege vis-à-vis blacks, and who in turn made him feel that he was crazy in his ravings against racism. He went on to discuss more about the state of his hating—it felt uncomfortably consum-

ing of his attention, it made him less inclined to be empathetic, and he found his thinking tending toward the simplistic. He then described a dilemma he felt in his work situation about how to negotiate his own competitiveness with white peers, and how to make sense of the perception that others sometimes held of him as too aggressive and threatening.

Mr. M had come into treatment on the recommendation of his white spouse, who had suggested he needed to work through his feelings about race. The dilemmas at work had a not-obvious import for his relationship with his spouse (the two of them would later begin couples therapy in response to increasingly explicit tension arising between them), and these dilemmas became further elaborated, alongside attention given to his envious reactions in the transference—specifically, to his experience of me as relatively privileged in education and economic background.

### *Vignette 3*

Mr. F, a dark-skinned, white man in his thirties, entered treatment after becoming aware of long-standing patterns of self-sabotage in his work and of distance in his family relations. I recommended psychoanalysis, but he questioned the necessity of such an expensive and long-term treatment. He agreed to meet for only twice-a-week, face-to-face work until he felt certain of its value.

One day, several months into what proved to be a frequently sadomasochistic transference, Mr. F became almost speechless while communicating his contempt for something I had said. “Nigger!” he finally blurted, with an intensity of poignant affect that was difficult for us to put into words, despite its having become recently familiar to me. When I asked what else the patient might be trying to tell me about what was happening inside him, he described his intense frustration that I had not empathized with him; as well, he desired for me to feel how belittled he felt by what I had said to him and by the inherent lack of attunement he perceived.

At later times, this same kind of interaction—a burgeoning state of negative emotion that occasioned a blankness in Mr. F's thinking, a sense of helplessness, and a subsequent desire to lash out at me—led us to discuss that, on occasions when he called me a “nigger,” he no longer felt like the confused and distressed one between us. I suggested eventually that he had then no longer felt envy over my ability to be the one apparently in control and able to speak. Over time, Mr. F ceased blurting out the racial epithet, and was more likely simply to report when he had begun to feel “that way” about me in relation to himself. As well, we began then to identify and talk about his “dark” aspects, what he would sometimes describe as a hateful side that attacked his ability to feel good and proud about himself.

## RACIST STATES OF MIND

In these vignettes, the individuals experienced themselves as immediately subject to a state of mind with significant affective, cognitive, and object relational characteristics, most of these somewhat easily brought to consciousness. Anger having to do with race—felt to be justified or not—had turned into racial hatred, and this global, negative emotion had some play in a way of thinking about race that tended toward the categorical. Furthermore, the people subject to such feelings and thoughts tended to experience their racial others in ways that were globally negative, while experiencing themselves simultaneously as opposite, even idealized.

### *Affect*

The global nature of negative affect was a central feature of each experience, especially before the specific character and origins of these feelings became clearer. Though psychoanalysis has been criticized as having much less to say in confronting and conceptualizing hate than love (Blum 1997), in discussing the nature

of psychic aggression, most major psychoanalytic theorists have addressed themselves more generally to this topic as it relates to hatred and to rage.<sup>1</sup>

From a more academic psychological perspective, Sternberg (2003, 2005) has suggested that global states of hate potentially comprise three components: negation of intimacy (the seeking of distance from target individuals or groups), passion (expressed as intense anger or fear in response to a threat), and commitment (wherein cognitions of devaluation and diminution through contempt are developed for the targeted group or individual). Various combinations of these may result in different types of hate. The episodes of hatred cited in the clinical vignettes above tend to involve high degrees of each component, the intensity holding particular significance for potential analytic value in each case.

Ms. N had been surprised by her feelings of racial hate, noting that they had developed only after she initiated treatment, and that they persisted despite her sense of them as irrational and unwanted. Mr. M had not been surprised by the existence of such feelings in himself, nor in their particular timing during our work together; yet, the intensity of the feelings disturbed him, and he was motivated to describe more about this feeling state in the hope of lessening its hold on his attention. Mr. F's states of racial hatred were less distressing to him in their emergence, if only because he perceived them to be justified in his experience of frustration at something I had or had not done. The three cases varied, then, in the extents to which the conscious hostility was ego-syntonic, involved others to a general or specific degree, and was experience-near.

In each case, however, the racial hatred seemed to be experienced less in terms of *actions specific to persons or groups hated*, and more in terms of *who these persons or groups were*. In fact, it

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<sup>1</sup> Dalal (2002) discusses the thinking of Freud, Klein, Fairbairn, and Winnicott as it is potentially relevant to racial aggression, and Rustin (1991) elaborates the thinking of Bion in this regard.

might be argued that the shift from the former to the latter characterizes the transformation of anger into hatred (Elster 2000; Suny 2004). Moreover, the intensity of the feeling made related thoughts and fantasies difficult to dismiss or repress; this spoke to the pervasiveness of their presence in the individual's mind.

### *Cognition*

The operative thinking during these states of mind can be described as categorical and dichotomous—matters are experienced globally not only in categorically exclusive terms, but as categorically opposite. Mr. M had been particularly aware of this quality in his thinking, and, like Ms. N, he was also aware of how different this state tended to be from other conscious states of perceiving. Rustin (1991) points out that this quality is more generally characteristic of racist thought, and—as similarly evidenced in Altman's (2000) pointed characterization of *black-and-white thinking*—Rustin notes the value for discussions of race of Kleinian descriptions of paranoid-schizoid states of psychic functioning. Such states highlight the centrality of splitting as a defense against depressive anxiety (Klein 1946), and they emphasize the danger to loving relationships of destructiveness that is both innate and developmental in nature.

In contrast to Klein's more internalist notions about the nature of split thinking, Dalal (2002) suggests that the social designation of race, by definition, structures the creation and reproduction of racial hierarchy; thus, he believes that Western thinking about race is inherently categorical. He notes Matte Blanco's (1998) distinction between *asymmetrical logic* (that is, the logic of differences wherein one categorical statement creates in the abstract at least a different category; and the space between categories, as well as the similarities within each, are made absolute) and *symmetrical logic* (the logic of similarities wherein categorical statements are identical to each other, and differences do not exist). Dalal argues that racial designations (and thus racism itself) operate largely by asymmetrical logic.



*Representations of Self and Other*

Also implicit in the experience of racialized persons or groups are representations of the racialized other and the racialized self. In the vignettes presented earlier, representations of the hated racial other were generally conscious—specific thoughts and fantasies were available to justify the feelings about who and what the other was. The representations of the racialized self were perhaps less conscious; yet, as many object relations theorists would agree (Kernberg 1975; Sandler 1990, among many), one representation tends to exist in relation to and coincident with its other. The self-representations implicit were affectively more positive—the self had been wronged and was thus experienced as being in the right; the self spoke from the position of having an essential subjectivity (or humanity) that the other presumably did not possess; and perhaps these factors and others contributed to a sense of the self that was unconsciously idealized.

The cognitive, affective, and relational qualities of such states posed an interesting psychoanalytic challenge, especially as such states contrasted with reflective analytic states operating at other times in each patient, and between each of them and me, over time. That such states occurred in the context of an unfolding treatment process had import for my countertransference—I was not particularly anxious or distressed by the expressions of hostility; if anything, my curiosity about the nature of these hostilities was piqued. In all these relationships, some appreciable degree of safety had been effected in the relationship, as well as an increasingly reliable therapeutic or working alliance. The particular features of that relational context are important to remember in considering both the emergence of such states, and their effects inside and outside the consulting room. I will return to these concerns in my concluding comments.

Other accounts of iatrogenic or episodic prejudice appear elsewhere within the clinical psychoanalytic literature. Bird (1957) describes the case of a white, Jewish woman who developed a violent hatred of black men, lasting for some two weeks, a year into

her analysis. This "racial symptom" entailed, in his view, a belief that these men were inferior, a suspicion that they would seek to elevate themselves by dating white women, and a hatred based in their inferiority and envy. Bird notes further that the patient's hatred was intermingled with a sense of fear. At first apparently inexplicable, the episode occurred in the context of other compelling transferences that had seemed unavailable for interpretation; the patient had developed a quick and strongly positive transference (she expressed on the first day of her analysis a fantasy of being married to the analyst), which he suspected had become displaced over time onto other men, and she developed soon afterward a "constant, many-veiled hostility" (p. 495), which probably served defensive purposes.

Bird suggests that his patient made use of a gulf between races to represent an isolating and segregating gulf between the two of them—in particular, to emphasize that she was Jewish while he was not; she was the patient and he the analyst; she was female and he male, among other contrasting pairs. He hypothesizes that his analysis of her defenses against the positive transference heightened her desire to cross that gulf, mobilizing in turn a defensive hatred that would become displaced from her experience of him in their relationship onto safer others. Moreover, Bird argues that she identified with her imagined concept of him while projecting forbidden impulses onto the men she feared and hated; he adds that "her resentment of the supposed advances by the Negro represented the imagined resentment I would display if she gave in to her impulses" (p. 497).

Bird's formulations are clearly rooted in a structural metapsychology of psychic functioning. Within that framework, he highlights the mechanism of double displacement (identification/projection) as central to the phenomenon of prejudice in that distinct group of people whom he identifies as prejudiced. He suggests that such persons develop prejudiced feelings, then repress and set up a defense (e.g., reaction formation) against them. Moreover, using this case study, he suggests that the mechanisms come into being during early development as a means of inhibiting di-

rect expression of oedipal aggression toward beloved family members, to whom the child wishes to remain positively attached. And, in this case, he argues that the feelings of hatred were unconsciously directed at the patient's mother and siblings.

In a discussion of general ideas about the origins of racism, Young-Bruehl (1996) refers to Bird's case as one involving one type of *hysterical prejudice*. Hysterical prejudices entail the use of various hysterical defenses against unconscious hostility, directed either at siblings in competition for the mother or father, at one parent in the service of loving the other exclusively, or, in males, against paternally related homoeroticism. Bird's case involved the first of these, she suggests, and it may be one of the more frequent types of racial prejudice.

In the child clinical literature, Silverman (1985) describes the sudden onset of anti-Chinese prejudice in a four-year-old girl. Though it is not clear that the outbreak occurred within the context of a psychotherapy (or even led to a consultation for it), the case describes how chance events dovetailed with attributes of that racial group and with salient aspects of emotional conflicts to eventuate in the development of racial prejudice in an oedipal girl.

The (presumably white) girl described by Silverman, in addition to suddenly expressing negative feelings about Chinese people to her parents, neighbors, and nursery school teachers, became unable to tolerate the sight of an Asian person, or even to hear of anyone who was Chinese. This symptom arose in the context of the following family dynamics: an ambivalently exciting relationship with a brother who would tease her about not having a penis; her relationship with her father, whose extended business trips tended to leave her sad and dejected; and that with her mother, who was at times preoccupied and unhappy about serious problems in her marriage. The link between the child's prejudice against Chinese and these conflicts became clarified once it was discovered that a boy in her class had suggested they play a game wherein he would show her his penis, while she would show him her "china."

Silverman suggests that the girl developed her symptom in response to all that was going on in her interpersonal life, and to

her own struggles with narcissistic injury and with rage toward those people she most loved. By linking *china* with *vagina*, she dealt with her sense of rejection by reversal and identification with the aggressor, he suggests. This so-called projective scapegoating is a mechanism outlined by Zilboorg (1947) and discussed in slightly different terms by Bird (1957). Notable is the developmental timing of this symptom—the oedipal onset of such prejudice was suggested by Bird (1957) and by Sterba (1947), with the symptom of prejudice described as a defense against oedipal aggression. Also notable is the related use of such a mechanism to preserve in consciousness certain aspects of the relationship to important others (and perhaps to internal object relations and configurations as well).

In a discussion of transference and countertransference dimensions of anti-Semitism in the clinical setting, Knafo (1999) notes that patients bring up anti-Semitic sentiments at crucial times in their treatment: “These expressions emerge in associations, fantasies, and dream material as part of the transferences, conflicts, and resistances; when analyzed, the anti-Semitism often subsides or becomes more clearly linked to the patient’s underlying conflicts” (pp. 40-41). In a lengthy discussion of a treatment with a woman who had a Jewish parent who was largely absent through much of her life, Knafo describes how specific anti-Semitic feelings emerged in relation to the therapist, herself Jewish. The patient’s own intense ambivalence toward being Jewish became projected and enacted in relation to the therapist, and the sensitive analysis of this helped usher in a new phase of tolerating and understanding angry and sad feelings.

Knafo’s case is interesting because it highlights the fact that transference episodes of ethnic and racial hatred often occur as more easily accessible feelings of antagonism emerge. Similarly, feelings of intense aggression in the transference have been described as occurring at *expectable* moments of regression during the analytic process (Gabbard and Winer 1994), echoing Freud’s (1912) elaboration of the transference as typically proceeding affectionately until some moment wherein progress appears stalled.

Knafo suggests that, though feelings of prejudice may occur in neurotics, prejudice such as anti-Semitism involves the extreme use of defenses like splitting and projection that are more characteristic of borderline pathology. She adds that such defenses lend themselves to the organization of one's experiences in extreme and categorical terms. Furthermore, during anti-Semitic episodes, patients are in a more regressed, paranoid-schizoid state or position (Klein 1946). Emphasized herein is the notion that analytic regression can sometimes precipitate paranoid-schizoid states of experience in which splitting and projection predominate as defenses against anxiety. It seems reasonable to assume that the defenses of splitting and projection in the three patients described represent a fourth component (in addition to affect, cognition, and representations of self and other) of these states of racial aggression.

Though the states of splitting outlined here would most likely be described by Kleinians as a form of regression from (and defense against) depressive anxiety, Volkan (1997) and Traub-Werner (1984) highlight the role of perceived threat to the integrity of the self (cohesion as well as esteem) in experiences of anxiety related to ethnic and racial identifications. Extreme anxiety in response to threat occasions more generally the psychic regression just discussed, and potentially a regression in superego functioning (Blum 1995); self-protective responses are mobilized, in turn (Sandler and Sandler 1978). Some of these vignettes and cases remind us that intense anxiety may signal unbearably uncomfortable feelings of many kinds, not simply hostility—feelings of sadness or of love, for example.

## TRANSFERENCE AND RACIST STATES OF MIND

Perhaps a fifth and finally key component of states of racial hostility in the psychoanalytic context is the complex fact of the transference. In Gabbard and Winer's (1994) panel report on hate in the analytic setting, Donald Kaplan is cited as having said that the term *hate* has no useful meaning outside the context in which it

arises (p. 221); immediately implicit to my discussion of racist states of mind is a focus on the transference as context.

Transference is most typically described in terms of the predisposition to experience others (and probably the self) in terms of significant past relationships and events. In analytic treatment, those predispositions that have play in the formation and reproduction of psychological and relational distress are assumed to be especially important. Though classical psychoanalytic thought privileges infantile (oedipal and preoedipal) relationships with parental figures as central, the concept of transference has broadened over time to refer also to significant relationships with other attachment figures, less specific predispositions potentiating distortions in the experience of the therapist and the relationship, projections of whole-object and part-object worlds, as well as any of the therapist's reactions or transferences to the patient. Analysts influenced by large-group theory (Dalal 2002; Foulkes 1990; and Hopper 2003, among them) have even argued that the existence of a social unconscious suggests that the social world is also integral to the contents of projections and introjections involved in transferences.

In each of the opening vignettes of this paper, as well as in the other case reports discussed, the state of mind that the patient was subject to implicated his or her immediate relationship to the therapist. I was the object of Mr. F's immediate hatred in a way that was very direct and conscious. Ms. N and Mr. M consciously experienced their aggression in relation to quite nonspecific others, none of them in the room and none of them presumably even familiar to me; the immediate relationship with me became consciously relevant to them only after analytic exploration.

In all these cases, however, the state of mind involving racial aggression was related in some way to the expectable progress of the treatment. The emergence of the material occurred presumably after some measure of safety had been established, and after the analysis of resistances to the deeper emergence of transference had occurred. We might also assume that the likelihood had thus increased that certain meaningful projections—many of them

of several other relationships—would become available for enactment and exploration. Further, the racial projections were no doubt influenced by the fact that both the therapist and the patient were racial beings meeting together in the last years of the twentieth century and in the beginning of the twenty-first, inside the United States.

Many of the cited clinical accounts in which racial antagonisms were analyzed suggest, if indirectly, the time-specific and local quality of racial projections. Sterba's (1947) patient experienced black men partly in relation to anxiety over racial riots occurring in the 1940s, in response to integration efforts in northern urban neighborhoods, and Rodgers's (1960) patient in relation to anxieties having to do in part with Civil Rights activity in the South during the late 1950s. These incidents remind us not only that the content of racial projections (Traub-Werner 1984) will vary over time and from one location to another, but that there is an inherently fluid quality to what race means in the mind (Hamer 2002), in addition to the more socially fixed quality of race that can be internalized. Dalal's (2002) account of race and color in Britain calls upon a history of industrialization, slavery, and colonialism that is different from that of the United States, the Caribbean, or Latin America (though perhaps not essentially so, given the dynamics of modern capitalism in the development of these economies).

Social-psychoanalytic theorists might suggest that social reality enters the transference as predispositions in both patient and therapist, developed over time through projective and introjective processes. Particularly, the meanings of race for each person can be influenced by the dynamic relations between internalizations of what race means in the social context and idiosyncratic meanings of race, formed and reformed by individual psychic experience. Yanof (2000) has described the development of gender meanings, correspondingly, through a longitudinal case discussion, and Chodorow (1999) has elaborated similar ideas about how culture enters or is always present within the analytic consulting room. In alluding to Leary's (2000) discussion of race in the transference as a cocreated enactment, Suchet (2004) conceives these dynamics

from a perspective influenced more by Lacan. Suchet's case discussion privileges the moment-to-moment negotiation of these meanings in the transference, and she attends closely in her discussion to the countertransference.

All of these theorists seem to agree that the dynamic variability of social-psychological constructs like race and gender in the minds of each dyadic member of the analysis potentiates countless transferences between them. The same can be said, of course, about racism in the transference.

## CONCLUSION

The racist transference occurring within an analytic therapy is a dynamic state of mind created within an ongoing experience of relationship, and is sometimes shared by both persons. This transference is potentiated by relevant predispositions within each member of the dyad, the social and historical context within which the roles and processes of the relationship are defined, the unfolding of conscious and unconscious attention to the transference, the within-therapy negotiation of a shared history of meanings unique to the dyad, the mutual exchange of moment-to-moment identifications with the other, fluctuations in identifications with racial group memberships, and more.

Some race-related event perceived as occurring or about to occur triggers a sense of danger, which in turn mobilizes regression to a level of psychic functioning that alters or colors thinking, polarizes object and self-representations, and activates defenses that seek to ward off the unbearably uncomfortable. Conversely, material not particularly relevant to race mobilizes the sense of danger, such that racist thoughts and feelings, probably easily available in a racialized society, are recruited for psychically defensive purposes.

What follows in the room is the analytic engagement with such states, moment-to-moment activity that is perhaps best described as a sequence of projections and introjections on the part of both parties, mediated mostly through language, and occasioning,



where successful, a deeper experience of the relevance of such racialized material for the immediate relationship, the lessening of the sense of danger in relation to this material, and an expanded understanding of the additional meanings that such material holds.

Ironically, though, the original experience of race-related danger in the analytic situation potentially emerges within a transference relationship that is also experienced on some level as safe and helpful. The regression may indeed serve the patient's progressive strivings, and it could be argued that such strivings make this transference regression even more likely to occur. It may be further argued that the episodes of racial hostility described in this paper differ in quality, therefore, from those occurring in very different contexts. The verity of this argument remains open to questioning, but it serves to reinforce the significance for the particular quality of racial hostility expressed between people of the immediate context.

Transferences occurring outside the scope of the therapy relationship, said by many to be ubiquitous, focus attention on the fact that, in racist transferences held not only by individuals but perhaps as well by groups small and large, features of the immediate social context are significantly responsible for the activation and maintenance of ethnic group identifications and for shared states of racist thinking, feeling, and behavior. Though we should be wary of trying to fully account for small- and large-group social phenomena by reference to processes occurring in a psychotherapy or psychoanalysis, it is clear that there are relevant parallels in terms of how racism can be evoked and negotiated between two people to either increase or lessen the chance that it will be reproduced.

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## THE WRECKING EFFECTS OF RACE AND SOCIAL CLASS ON SELF AND SUCCESS

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*The literature on success neurosis has expanded in recent years to include a consideration of preoedipal as well as oedipal factors. Typically, success neurosis is considered to be a symptomatic result of complex intrapsychic phenomena, whether they be at the oedipal and/or preoedipal level. Having previously considered that success neurosis can also be determined by internalized representations of "real" factors, such as racism and poverty (Holmes, in press, b) the author here considers how these factors become primary intrapsychic building blocks of success neurosis through their negative impact on the components of success in the self and the ego.*

### INTRODUCTION

In Freud's three works on the theme of success neurosis (1916, 1919, 1936), he defined the phenomenon as an intrapsychically determined aberration in which one is wrecked by one's success when that success triggers recollections of one's "criminal" intent from childhood, that being oedipal victory. As an example of success neurosis, he detailed the disturbance of memory he himself experienced on mounting the Acropolis. He linked his ego disturbance to the punishing effects of guilt over his oedipal rivalry with his father.

Thus, the proposition that success neurosis is caused by oedipal guilt was emphasized by Freud, and most other psychoanalytic contributors through the years have followed suit, until quite re-

cently. However, Freud himself identified another factor, a reality-based one. Specifically, concerning his pilgrimage to the Acropolis, Freud (1936) said:

It seemed to me beyond the realms of possibility that I should travel so far—that I should go such a long way. *This was linked up with the limitations and poverty of our conditions of life in my youth.* [p. 247, italics added]

In this paper, I will explore how impoverishing conditions of one's youth, and particularly experiences with race and social class, damage the self, i.e., one's estimation of oneself and related ego functions, thereby making both the achievement and maintenance of success difficult.

## INFLUENCES OF RACISM AND CLASSISM IN OUR CULTURE

Freud's emphasis was on how one is wrecked by success (e.g., his temporary lapse of ego resourcefulness in the realm of memory), but he did not really clarify how such disturbance could be linked to poverty in one's youth. My thesis is that our culture's attitudes and practices regarding race and social class inevitably cause significant and lasting damage to the self for all who live in this culture. All transactions in our culture regarding race and social class are premised on the views that nondominant races and the poor are inferior, and that Euro-Americans and the rich are superior. Wealth and human services are distributed accordingly. Substandard health care is what is expected and delivered to members of nondominant races and to the poor, with appalling consequences. Woolf et al. (2004) reported that 886,000 deaths could have been prevented between 1991 and 2000 if African Americans had received the same health care as whites. Expensive new medical technologies saved only one-fifth as many lives in the same time span.

The psychodynamics of this lopsided and egregious picture have been understood for years, beginning with Adorno et al.'s

(1982) work on the psychoanalytic underpinnings of authoritarianism, the basis of which is projection of threatening internal states, a theme revived by Moss (2001). Moss defines misogyny, homophobia, and racism as structured forms of hatred that are organized as defense against the dangers of recognizing one's own wishes. He posits that these dangers are so great that all manner of ego distortion is permissible to support hatreds as defense. Ego functions are distorted and mobilized to support the hating of others, including disidentification with the hated others, substitution of indiscriminate misperception of—rather than differentiated thought about—others, and suspension of judgment and control in the service of hateful acts.

It is my proposition that those employing such defenses have *de facto* serious ego disturbances. Likewise, those on the receiving end of such defenses also develop ego disturbances. As I noted in another context:

Galatzer-Levy and Cohler (2002) have written convincingly about the disturbances to the core identity of gays and lesbians owing to the social pressures of growing up in a hetero-normative world. Similarly, I suggest that racial minorities and those from humbler socio-economic beginnings suffer intrapsychic difficulties, including success neurosis, as a function of growing up in a Euro-American-normative and affluence-normative world. [Holmes, *in press*, b]

## THE ROLE OF FORBIDDEN WISHES

How might we consider the forbidden wishes of those on the two sides of the inevitable racial and class divides that are the subject of this paper? The wishes that fall within the standard psychoanalytic purview in regard to success neurosis are oedipal wishes, and, as noted, they have already been well discussed in the literature. Freud's papers referenced earlier are excellent examples. More recent papers (Levy, Seelig, and Inderbitzin 1995; Marill and Siegel 2004) have considered cases involving preoedipal determi-

nants and protracted success neurosis expressed as entrenched, self-defeating behaviors.

In these latter cases, we find a bridge to the interests addressed in this paper. Namely, in patients presented in the literature in which preoedipal factors are implicated, the wishes involved are more primal, such as the wish to be loved and to not lose the loved object whom one wishes to be loving. If that early, needed object is inaccessible, or, at worst, cruel, the wishful one risks great psychic pain in acknowledging the wish for the other. In some such cases, there may be a particular need to disavow the wish, to re-define it as bad, and to project it onto another not recognized as like oneself. Such can be the kernel of the hatefulness linked to race, gender, and sexual preference, as described by Moss (2001).

In my experience, the linking of *preoedipal* to success neurosis usually involves such basic wishes and related vulnerabilities of the self (low self-esteem), making such persons particularly prone to reliance on primitive ego mechanisms, such as the externalizing defenses that are characteristic in racism and classism. This may be so whether one is considering the perpetrator or the victim. The perpetrator's target of projection may be one of another race, class, gender, or sexuality who is designated as sufficiently unlike oneself to warrant being hated and declared worthless or dangerous for the wishes now assigned to the other. The projective mechanisms fueling the reclassification of the other include viewing the target of the projection and the projected wishes as wanton, despicable, and deserving of destruction.

In such circumstances, the target or victim may healthily reject the worthless designation that has been assigned to him or her. A celebrated case in point is that of Ruth Simmons, who became president of Brown University in 2000. She is the first African American to lead an Ivy League university. When Dr. Simmons assumed the presidency of Smith College in 1994, she became the first African American to head a "Seven Sisters" school. Upon being named to her post, she reflected on the fact that she was the daughter of sharecroppers. She commented, "It was clear in the Jim Crow South that I was not to expect opportunities, *but I knew that my mind could take me anywhere*" (Simmons 1994, p. A15, ital-

ics added). By whatever processes that she developed such a sure grip of her self-estimation and capacities, in so doing, she insulated herself from the potentially ruinous efforts of the Jim Crow South to wreck her capacities, her success, and indeed her very self.

In contrast to the Dr. Simonsones of the world, most of those suffering success neurosis linked to racism and classism are apt to find that the disavowing messages take hold in the mind in a primary way, in my view. It remains endemic in our society to classify capacities and skills along racial and class lines, despite overwhelming evidence that race and class are socially constructed and without explanatory power on the biological basis that rationalizes unfair distribution of resources (Smedley and Smedley 2005). Many fall prey to this spurious message and suffer damage to self and ego capacity.

In those persons of color and lower class who are so affected (i.e., who internalize the message that they are not to succeed, that they are not worthy of success), the pursuit of success is *de facto* taboo, and, as such, must be punished. I argue that these views are set down in the mind extremely early and that they damage one's readiness to pursue that which one's society systematically opposes. Those societal opposing forces may also be internalized in one's superego, leading one to punish oneself for any pursuit of success, as well as to anticipate punishment from real oppressing forces. So, either success is denied by the real and later internalized perpetrator, or, if pursued, it occurs at great personal cost, since one is haunted by one's essential "crime"—not by a fantasized oedipal or preoedipal one, but by a crime that our society indicts and condemns even more. Namely, if one is not in the right racial grouping or social class, one is extremely negatively valued, and this valuation often becomes a highly malignant, introjected reality that one should not aspire to success on any level. (This point of view does not preclude the additional active participation of the usual influences we consider in the establishment of success neurosis, such as oedipal factors, however.)

The damage to self that I am discussing, that related to race and socioeconomic class, differs from that which Freud suffered.



The perceptual distortion that he indeed did suffer was a price required by his neurosis, albeit transiently, for fantasized competition with and surpassing of an oedipal father. Clearly, Freud did in reality surpass the successes of his father, and whatever this meant at a fantasy level, he could tolerate it with apparent minor disruption or damage to his sense of self, his ego functioning, or his actual success. The kind of damage under discussion here is a more fundamental damage to the self, in that it causes fundamental doubt of one's capacities. Such doubt may lead to stunted use of one's abilities, limitations in actual success achieved, or the eventual actual wrecking of a high level of success.

Considerations about the role of race and class in the formation of a success neurosis are *not* considerations about diagnosis per se. The racialized or class-bound problems in self-definition, ego functioning, and attenuated or wrecked success may be organized in various ways. Some in devalued racial and class groupings do manage to largely escape these ravages to success (for example, Dr. Simmons, as noted above), thereby escaping the pernicious influences of racism and classism that are the subject of this paper. When the effects of these influences take hold, they may do so to varying degrees and at various levels of psychopathology.

## ADDRESSING THESE ISSUES IN THE CLINICAL SETTING

What can we observe about the various effects of race and class on success neurosis in the clinical situation? The clinical literature is highly concentrated on those who have been on the receiving end of racism and classism. However, psychological damage and limitations in success related to race and class are to be found in those from dominant and nondominant groups as well. Few white analysts in our culture talk about race and class factors in their clinical papers, especially as these relate to white patients. Why is this so? Surely there is no one answer to the question. The one I often hear is that such issues do not come up in analyses of white patients with white analysts.

My own view is that there is a culture-wide defensive barrier to recognizing the implicit representation of and derivative communications about such factors. But for analysts to remove that barrier would accomplish what analysis is designed to accomplish, that is, the radical redefinition of our own overdetermined views, fantasies, and variously compromised solutions to our psychological problems. We keep hidden what threatens us. Analysts are no less prone than is the general population to keeping racial and class issues repressed and unanalyzed. Moskowitz (2001, p. 275) paraphrases Jacoby (1983) in this regard: "In brief, he [Jacoby] states that knowledge gets repressed when it threatens the class and power relationships of a culture."

Moskowitz, a white Jewish analyst, reported his own racial discoveries, which he laments were only partially made in his analysis:

I remember vividly a dream from my therapy. In it I was denied access to a building by an imposing black doorman. My therapist pointed out that his own name was Schwartz, which I needed him to remind me means "black" in Yiddish. The associations and interpretations that followed related to my oedipally viewing him like my father, by denying me access to my mother's body and not providing me with the key that would give me the power to turn her on. He was my "Schwartz-father," my black father of the night. That I portrayed him as a doorman, with its racist stereotypes, was an attempt to diminish his power. Other dreams and fantasies about black men led back to my analyst, and I'd like to say that this in turn led me to further insights into my fear and envy of black men. And it did, *but not in that analysis. The image stayed with me over the years and got elaborated and further analyzed, and I still work on it.* [2001, p. 274, italics added]

Moskowitz's report is revealing in several ways: It shows the importance that race can have in the analysis of a white person, and that the racial aspect may be obscured or implicit. This seems so obvious, and yet these factors are vastly underrepresented in the psychoanalytic literature. Furthermore, Moskowitz pointed out

that his analyst was savvy in addressing the partially obscured racial meanings on the surface of his dreams, but that he did not analyze the deeper meanings of Moskowitz's racialized transference. Where did the analyst stop? He stopped *before* he and the patient got to an awareness of the patient's unrecognized fear and envy of black men. In other words, the analytic process stopped short of recognition of black men as having anything to envy or fear.

I suggest that this is a fairly typical example of how race is addressed in analytic treatments—that is, to whatever degree it is dealt with, it stops short of the more fundamental ways in which race is affecting the patient and the analyst. In the same paper, Moskowitz commented on the fact that he came from socioeconomically impoverished circumstances. How that was addressed in his analysis was not explicated. However, it is to be noted that he did comment on his lack of direct interaction with blacks in his youth. So, here is a case in point showing that race and racial issues can enter the mind profoundly, whether or not one has had direct experience with those of another race. In our culture, racism and classism are systemic; their influences do not depend on direct personal experience.

Consonant with Moskowitz's experience with a white analyst, I, a black analyst, have had white patients who, when we were in the throes of working through racialized transference-countertransference reactions, have expressed the wish to be in analysis with a white analyst. They have had the fantasy (that may also be reality) that in such an analysis, they would not have had to work through the various meanings of race.

## CLINICAL EXAMPLES

To follow are three cases in which race and/or class played a predominant role in the treatment of problems with self-definition, ego functioning, and success.

### *Case A*

Dr. Green was a 38-year-old, obese, black female who was an unmarried college professor when she entered treatment because

of problems controlling her weight and chronic unhappiness in her relationships with men. In our first appointment, by way of introduction, she said, "I'm the oldest of seven children with four fathers." She also noted that she had grown up in wretched poverty in a multiethnic ghetto in a large city. The family maintained itself on welfare benefits and on the mother's steady but modest employment income. By earning a doctorate, Dr. Green surpassed all her sisters and brothers, none of whom had been schooled beyond high school. Of her two drug-addicted brothers, one had died of HIV-AIDS, and one of her sisters had a major mental illness with transient psychotic episodes. Dr. Green presented with histrionic and narcissistic features.

At the end of three years of once- or twice-weekly, insight-oriented psychotherapy, Dr. Green married. Her weight remained a venue for regressive shifts throughout the therapy. At one such point of instability early in her marriage, she convinced her husband to permit one of her friends and the friend's lover to move into their new home temporarily while the friends' new home was being completed. This decision resulted in major disruption in the patient's life, as the friends destroyed property and were boisterous and irresponsible in meeting the agreed-upon financial obligation. The patient realized that she had brought this trouble to herself as a punishment for daring to escape the chaos and poverty of her youth.

As her insights began to take hold, Dr. Green said one day, "I like the way I look these days. I've lost some pounds and many inches." With pleasure, she also shared that she was learning and enjoying the better money-management skills that her husband was teaching her. She commented that she had not been entirely at peace, however, in that she felt troubled by a recurring dream over the preceding few weeks, in which she went into a familiar room with family members and friends, all of whom were dead.

Dr. Green: Maybe I was dead, too; I wasn't sure.

Therapist: Could it be that you threaten yourself with death and call upon images of dead loved ones as a

way of stepping back from your increased liveliness and successes?

The patient's response was to recall a dream from the year before, in which she had gone home to her grandmother's house, where she found dead family members. She wanted to sleep there, but her grandmother had said no. She came to recognize a grandmother transference to me, as follows:

Dr. Green: Last year, when I mentioned that dream, I felt strangely hurt; I didn't understand then that you and she weren't rejecting me. Now I get it. She and you were saying, "Go out and live! It's okay; you can leave us."

I think this vignette illustrates the distortions formed in this patient's superego related to her lower class standing, which was represented in her as deadening internal objects that kept her aspirations for success at bay. Interpretation of the aggression that had been turned against herself, and of a retreat to dead and deadening internal objects to hold her in check, enabled her to begin to free herself. She began to redefine herself, that is, to feel entitled to a positive (non-obese) self-image, to use her smarts more effectively (for example, with good money management), and to enjoy even fuller success. She was promoted and became tenured. This success was achieved through work on her "ordinary" core issues (e.g., sibling rivalries and guilt), but also—and as important—her success resulted from resolution of her internal representations of structured, institutional racist proscriptions against her success. By all these means, she had held herself, and had been held, to a low rank for many years.

### *Case B*

Ms. Brown, an African American woman in her late twenties, was much envied by her family for her Ivy League college education and the meteoric rise in her career in telecommunications. Her two siblings made particularly derogatory use of race whenever she frustrated them, such as when she queried them about

their need of a loan that they demanded she make to them. They assailed her with the invective "Super Nigger." (One might be tempted here to limit one's search for psychodynamic meanings to a consideration of sibling rivalry and related underlying issues; however, while such a perspective would be important, by itself it would be limited, as was especially highlighted when the patient came back for a second course of treatment.)

In her first treatment of four-times-per-week psychoanalysis on the couch, Ms. Brown achieved stability and joyfulness in her career. She returned after a several-year absence in the throes of a difficult marriage, in which extreme verbal abuse was being traded between her husband and herself. The second course of treatment was a once-weekly, insight-oriented psychotherapy.

Within months of returning to treatment, Ms. Brown filed for divorce. She steadied herself with good feelings about her high level of career success and began to explore her chronically unsuccessful relationships with men. She was determined to become as successful in love as she had been in her employment. The necessary work to free herself to love involved her gaining awareness of her pattern of casting off men lest they see the gaps in her own sense of self, especially her impoverished and depriving internal objects.

While I have reported on this case previously, with emphasis on ordinary characterological and neurotic features (Holmes 1992 and in press, a), my emphasis here is on the racial basis of the patient's low sense of self-worth. This aspect came to light as we worked on Ms. Brown's musings on the fact that she felt very hurt by the last man to rebuff her—at which point she was still unaware of her inclination to hold men at bay, thus instigating their rejection of her. His leaving her triggered a brief repeat of an earlier pattern of promiscuity. Fairly quickly, she began to examine this behavior in lieu of continuing to engage in it. In this more reflective mode, the following work took place:

Ms. Brown: I want to have a fabulous life with a man. I had hoped to have that with Jim [the most recent man to leave her].

Therapist: What would make your life fabulous?

Ms. Brown: We'd go places and people would notice him and then me. He's so bright. People pay attention.

Therapist: There's something validating about that brightness. You feel good in its midst. It's confirming.

Ms. Brown: (chuckling) I'm thinking of my neighbor Paul. He told me, "You know, I like your quirks; they're what make you *you*." I liked that. That's what I wanted from Jim—that good feeling about myself.

Therapist: At some point in life, we all want that to come from particular others.

Ms. Brown: (tearing up) My mom just couldn't do it, and my dad wasn't there. My mom seemed almost ashamed of me, like when my grandmother said I had bad table manners, and when my aunt told her I was asking for too many things on a shopping trip.

Therapist: I wonder what made them so uptight about having good manners. They're important, sure; but I wonder what made your mother and grandmother so uptight. (Here I was wondering about family background and the fact that many blacks feel they need to do things absolutely correctly lest they be harshly judged by whites. I then asked her to tell me what she knew about how her grandmother and mother grew up.)

Ms. Brown: My grandmother and grandfather grew up on a farm in \_\_\_\_ [a southern state]. My grandfather kept whites away because he knew what

they thought of blacks, and he didn't want his family exposed to all of that.

Therapist: "That"?

Ms. Brown: (After a pause) Well, they don't think much of black folks.

Therapist: (In the patient's pause, I was thinking that no one really escapes the influences of harshness that often gets constructed racially and then gets recorded apocryphally, as in the story about the grandfather's keeping away whites. The grandmother's and aunt's insistence on good manners and the mother's shame may have contained elements of such racially constructed harshness.) As you know, up to now we have not talked much about your own personal racial experiences. Do you have anything more to share about them?

Ms. Brown: Once when I was in first grade, I had some fancy barrettes in my hair. The white girl next to me said they were hers. I told the teacher, "No, my aunt gave them to me yesterday," but the teacher took them out of my hair and put them in the other little girl's hair.

What is critical about Ms. Brown's early life experiences in terms of the wrecking influences of race on her sense of self and her success? Her memory of her first-grade experience brings to light how her early exposure to racism contributed in an essential way to her failure to develop an adequate sense of self. She came to know and to internalize the view that a little black girl's reality and belongings were not her own; that another's power and definition of reality would be substituted for her own; and that if she protested, she would be declared a liar and a thief.

At first, the transference took on these markings. The patient's distrust of me was intense and persistent. Interpretations that fo-



cused on her experiencing me as like the first-grade teacher who would rob her of her own sense of reality and her appeal, turning her into a bad person, were helpful. Gradually, her own rage became more decipherable to her, and she could own it and reshape it into constructive uses. She came to feel more real and solid. She became able to disidentify with and shed the racialized worthlessness that had defined her. She began to associate therapy with benign personal validation that started from the outside—i.e., with what I could give her in the work, but realized that she could then claim this, *or not*, as her own.

As these changes took place in the second therapy, Ms. Brown became able to let men get closer to her, and she could relate to them less guardedly and more lovingly. What was coming from the outside could be better differentiated, and not automatically viewed in racialized terms as something or someone determined to further demean her.

### *Case C*

Ms. Hill, a Euro-American woman, entered a four-sessions-per-week psychoanalysis on the couch at age thirty-six, because of an inability to finish her Master's degree or to be successfully employed, although in the past she had been a successful conference and facilities manager. At the beginning of analysis, she had been married nine years to her second husband, with whom she had given birth to two girls, ages three and five; she had lost a three-day-old son to birth defects seven years before the treatment began. She was plagued by guilt that she had not completely mourned his death.

The patient's first marriage, which had begun during her early twenties, failed after several years, when she discovered that her husband was addicted to multiple perverse sexual practices. Her present, second husband came from an extremely wealthy family. He actively embraced an orthodox religion quite different from her own orthodox religion, in which she was observant. They shared difficulty in being productive, successful workers and lived off the largess of his parents.

Ms. Hill's background was economically impoverished. She was conceived when her mother and father were sixteen and seventeen years old, respectively. She felt that her essential and abiding worth to her mother was as a ticket out of poverty, in that her parents' marriage was occasioned by her pregnancy with the patient. The patient's mother had come from a chaotic home and had reveled in the pleasures of moving into her husband's home, which was modest but more orderly and loving. For much of her childhood, the patient and her parents—as well as the patient's five-year-younger brother, who was described as functioning marginally—lived with the patient's paternal grandparents.

Ms. Hill scoffed at the idea of any truth to her mother's idealized picture of the patient's paternal grandparents' home, inasmuch as her mother suffered severe depression, with multiple suicidal gestures, throughout Ms. Hill's childhood. Furthermore, the patient felt very unprotected in the grandparents' home; she was exposed many times to her parents' sexual activity, which she found intensely exciting and scary.

The following vignette from the second year of the patient's analysis is offered to illustrate how an entrenched impoverished view of herself determined the patient's work inhibition and bound up the unacceptable aspirations for success underlying that inhibition.

Ms. Hill: We're going to send the girls to private school . . . . I'm also trying to figure out how to go back to school myself. My school (where she had worked toward her Master's degree) has created an opportunity for me to finish, even though I probably have passed the deadline, but completing my Master's degree takes money that we don't have.

Analyst: You seemed to reach an impasse when thinking about your own aspirations. That sense of limitation wasn't there when you spoke of private schooling for your daughters. I wonder what

made money limitations come to mind at the point you were thinking of advancement for yourself?

Ms. Hill: I think of my mother's repeated failures at work, and the fact that she never finished high school. I don't have her permission to be successful. I wonder how I'd feel about all of this if my parents were dead. (long pause)

Analyst: You stopped talking after the thought of how you'd feel if they were dead.

Ms. Hill: I didn't want to say how angry I get at them. I don't think they'd be proud of me. They're more likely to dote on my down-and-out brother than on me. They don't like much of what I do. To succeed is to risk being criticized and rejected by them. So I say, "Don't worry—see, I'm a failure, too. No threat."

Analyst: I hear your bitterness and I feel it. Does it keep you from being actively angry, and thereby keep your fears of retribution from coming to the surface? When you join them in being poor and having low expectations, do you hold off their wrath?

Ms. Hill: Well, maybe I can move on and be my own person. I want to get to a place where I can withstand whatever my parents may think without feeling completely fractured. (pause) I'm reminded of times I'd come home from school feeling dejected (she had been socially ostracized as a child for acting "snooty"). My mother would get very agitated and would say things like, "What do they think? We're not poor white trash!" If we weren't, why did she keep saying that?!

Analyst: Perhaps we could reflect on the fact that you've repeated that memory here numerous times. In

its continuing to come to your mind, do you reveal a struggle of your own between a devalued view of yourself and a more adequate one?

Ms. Hill: It's a way I have of holding on, holding on to a certain picture without the messy stuff.

Analyst: "The messy stuff"?

Work on the "messy stuff" was thematic throughout Ms. Hill's analysis. Her understandings of its meanings over time were many. For example:

Patient: It's confusing. I felt like I belonged to both my parents, and each was mine to have. I competed with mom for dad, and then I felt like I wanted to take her from him, that I could take better care of her than he did. At times, I felt like the perfect parent and the best lover of all. Whew! I'd feel giddy at times, and then I'd crash.

Ms. Hill's analysis involved many efforts to help her understand the explanatory power of low expectations associated with the poverty of her youth and its repetitions in her adult life. The therapeutic efforts included an ego psychological approach and self psychological efforts (as when I interpreted above that she struggled between a devalued view of herself and a more adequate one). The latter frame of reference was important in helping us arrive at a clear picture of her need to bring herself back down into poverty in order not to experience the somewhat disorganizing, grandiose excitement, narcissistic self-sufficiency, and manic exhibitionism signified by success.

For Ms. Hill, succeeding ("doing it") was marred by its association with her parents' "doing it," that is, her observations of their having sex, which she reconstructed must have occurred in her infancy and well into her toddler years. Having been so overstimulated, she found it very difficult to neutralize her libidinal and aggressive urges.

However, I think that this explanation—while an essential part of her picture, familiar and comfortable for analysts—is incomplete. We need to add to it the primacy of the patient's impoverished background, including the passing on to her by her parents, especially her mother, that to be poor is to be forever wretched and held down. She had adapted to and felt grounded in (if also depressed) that view of herself (versus the giddy feeling associated with efforts to succeed, leading her to the intolerable anticipation of “crashing”). To avoid “crashing,” she held herself back. Crashing came to be understood as the utter failure required by the internalized condemning voice that sentenced her to poverty and mediocrity at best. Later in treatment, Ms. Hill came to tolerate the anxiety signaling such a crash, and was able to analyze it rather than giving into its demands that she not progress or succeed.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Freud viewed the victim of success neurosis as suffering from having committed the “crime” of fantasized oedipal intentions. Success-destroying inner influences have been extended to include “bad” preoedipally anchored motivations, such as leaving a beloved primary object. In this paper, I have considered the disruption to self valuation and success occasioned by the internalization of racism and classism—two dominant influences in our society that define members of the out-of-favor group as unworthy, dangerous, and deserving of the worst. Those who project these views are self-damaging, as are those who introject such views. Those on both sides of the divide suffer damage to their core sense of self and impaired ego functioning. The effects of racism and classism on the human psyche are akin to those of trauma in that they cause interferences in ego functioning, including strivings for and maintenance of success, even when basic ego capacities may be intact (Ritvo 1981).

The psychological damage resulting from the toxic effects of racism and classism is not beyond the reaches of psychoanalytic

treatment, as this paper has attempted to show in the case material. However, there is a question as to whether such treatments are apt to be fully utilized by psychoanalytic practitioners in situations where race and class issues are causal in the formation of success neurosis. Anecdotal evidence (Holmes 1992; Moskowitz 2001) suggests not. Analysts shy away from comprehensive analysis of the influences of race and class. In an earlier paper (Holmes 1999), I gave an example of my own enactment with a patient in which I shunned the racial dimension of the transference. I gained clarity and courage to address it fully with the patient only after analyzing the bases of my avoidance in my own analysis.

Organized psychoanalysis must do more to ensure that the central importance of racism and classism are addressed in the field. For example, although the American Psychoanalytic Association has made a start by forming active committees devoted to consideration of training issues related to gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual preference, the Association's Board on Professional Standards has not established any standards relative to the inclusion of such issues in psychoanalytic curricula. Nor does the American Psychoanalytic Association study these issues in its accrediting reviews of psychoanalytic institutes. The American may wish to consider the approach of the American Psychological Association, which through its Committee on Accreditation monitors all accredited training programs' attention to issues of cultural diversity in student and faculty recruitment and retention and in didactic courses and supervision (Homes 2005).

Until psychoanalysis embraces these issues in these ways, race and class, and how they impact the human psyche in the psychoanalytic consultation room, will remain insufficiently explored and mastered. In society at large, movement in diminishing the pernicious influences of race and class prejudice did not occur without government oversight. Progress in psychoanalysis on these issues will be enhanced when, likewise, its governing bodies take the opportunity and responsibility to embrace cultural diversity by attending to issues of race and social class in the training and staffing of institutes and in the reward systems therein. When a stan-

dard regarding cultural diversity is established and systematic and intentional plans are put in place in institutes to ensure proper attention to it, we will truly be able to help our patients and our profession attain fuller opportunities for success.

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## RACIAL IDENTITIES, RACIAL ENACTMENTS, AND NORMATIVE UNCONSCIOUS PROCESSES

BY LYNNE LAYTON, PH.D.

*The author surveys various views of racial and ethnic identity, and proposes a model of thinking about identity aimed at capturing both its oppressive and its facilitating character. To further elaborate the dual nature of identity, she discusses the way that inequities in the social world, and the ideologies that sustain them, produce narcissistic wounds that are then enacted consciously and unconsciously by both patient and therapist. A variety of such enactments are presented in a summary of the author's work with an Asian American patient, during which she began to recognize unconscious racial and cultural underpinnings of some of the ways she has thought about certain "basics" of psychoanalytic practice: dependence, independence, happiness, and love.*

### ON RACIAL / ETHNIC IDENTITY

What *do* we mean when we speak of racial or ethnic identities? Do we refer to categories that are coherent, socially constructed, and inherently oppressive, as many theorists assert? Dalal (2002), for example, argues that racism precedes the concept of race, and Rustin (1991) asserts that "'Race' is both an empty category and one of the most destructive and powerful forms of social categoriza-

tion" (p. 57). Lacanian cultural critics often argue that coherent identities are oppressive fictions, and Morgan (2002) cites DNA evidence that "the term 'race' is a constructed idea with no objective basis in biology" (p. 567). Or, as those who see "identity" as less problematic argue (e.g., Volkan 2004), is it human nature to need a large-group identity and to form that identity by creating an us-them divide?

Or, as liberal multiculturalists might claim, are racial and ethnic identities simply based in cultural and/or biological differences not necessarily built on repudiation of otherness, differences that ought to be celebrated rather than denigrated? Do we understand racial and ethnic differences as discrete (the liberal as well as conservative model) or as related to each other and interimplicated (the poststructuralist model)? More particularly, do we think that nonwhite, non-Protestant identities are built in reference to dominant whiteness and Protestantism? And do those in subordinate positions then create hierarchical relations among and between themselves, all marked in some way by white dominance (Friedman 1995; Gooding-Williams 1993; Layton 1998)?

If we believe the latter, how do we understand such relations psychologically? In terms of perpetrators and victims? Do we then focus politically on redressing long histories of systemic prejudice and discrimination? Or, as "colorblind" adherents claim, do racial and ethnic identities rest on cultural and/or biological differences that ought to be ignored, ought not to be taken into account, when, for example, hiring or admitting to college? Finally, does it even make sense to speak of racial identities without simultaneously speaking of the way they intersect with class, gender, and other identity categories (R. M. Williams 1997)? Can we assume, in other words, that a racial identity is homogeneous, that blacks and whites of all classes and both genders experience race in the same way?

Obviously, thinking about racial and ethnic identities requires us first to do some thinking about identity *tout court*. Currently,

there are any number of theories that contest the definition of *identity*, and the struggle to define both identity and race is definitely a political matter, the outcome of which has important social consequences (which is obvious when we think of the differences in policy that derive from liberal ideology, e.g., affirmative action, versus colorblind ideology).

In earlier work (Layton 1998), I proposed a model for thinking about gender identity that I thought could account both for the narcissistic wounds incurred from living in a sexist culture and for the kind of gendered experiences we all have that make us feel good about being men or women or something in between. I called it a *negotiation model*, because I wanted to capture the way we constantly negotiate gender identity, both from what Benjamin (1988) and others call *doer-done to* relations and from relations of mutuality. In part, I was writing “against” postmodern and Lacanian theories that suggest that identity categories are necessarily coercive and oppressive, that no version of gender or racial identity is healthy (see, for example, several essays in Appiah and Gates 1995; Butler 1990; George 2001; Haraway 1985; several essays in Lane 1998; Mitchell and Rose 1985; Riley 1988).

At the same time, I wanted to give the coercive aspect of identities their due, because so often psychoanalytic theory ignores the psychic effects of the power hierarchies in which we live. The negotiation model accounts psychologically for the defensive and regressive use of identity categories (see Dimen 2003; Goldner 1991; May 1986), as well as for the progressive use of identity categories (for example, in liberation struggles and in the resiliency manifested by oppressed groups in spite of the hateful projections to which they are subjected).

To better understand the regressive and foreclosing use of identity categories, I have elaborated a concept I refer to as *normative unconscious processes* (Layton 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2006). With this term, I refer to the psychological consequences of living in a culture in which many norms serve the dominant ideo-

logical purpose of maintaining a power status quo.<sup>1</sup> More particularly, I have investigated the consequences of living within particular class, race, sex, and gender hierarchies. My assumption is that these hierarchies, which confer power and exist for the benefit of those with power, tend not only to idealize certain subject positions and devalue others, but tend to do so by splitting human capacities and attributes and giving them class or race or gender designations.

Such designations cause narcissistic wounds that organize the desire to belong to one group rather than another. These wounds become lived as class, race, gender, and sexual identities. In *Who's That Girl? Who's That Boy?* (Layton 1998), for example, I argued that gender inequality creates two different sub-versions of narcissism in men and women. I understand narcissism (drawing on Kohut 1971, 1977; Kernberg 1975; and, particularly, Fairbairn 1954 and Guntrip 1971, who refer to the syndrome as *schizoid*) to be a bipolar disorder in which fragile selves, wounded by traumatic failures in caretaking, oscillate between self-deprecation and grandiosity, idealization of the other and denigration, longings to merge and needs radically to distance the self from others (Layton, unpublished).

As Benjamin (1988), Chodorow (1978), and other feminist theorists have written, for a long period of capitalist-patriarchal history, dominant norms of middle-class masculinity idealized a form

<sup>1</sup> The way I formulate the connection between power hierarchies and lived experience (Layton 1998, 2002) derives from the way I put together relational psychoanalytic feminist and social theory—as described, for example, by Altman (1995), Benjamin (1988), Chodorow (1978), Dimen (2003), Goldner (1991), Harris (1991), Leary (1995, 1997), Lesser (1997), Schwartz (1992, 1995)—with poststructuralist theories, especially the work of Butler (1995), and Bourdieu's (1984) work on “distinction” and class. My theory of normative unconscious processes also owes a debt to the culturalist psychoanalytic tradition of Fromm (1941), to Kohut's (1971, 1977) theories of narcissism, and to Fairbairn's (1954) theories of schizoid personality, as well as to Klein's (1946) theories of schizoid mechanisms. A few clinicians in Great Britain, primarily of the group psychoanalytic tradition, have also elaborated ideas about a social unconscious in relation to clinical practice; I refer the reader particularly to Hopper (2003) and Dalal (2002), as well as to one of Dalal's primary sources, Foulkes (1990).

of autonomy that comes into being by splitting off dependency, vulnerability, and embeddedness in relationships. This form of autonomy values mastery over external and internal nature, and so rejects an *I-Thou* relation to nature. Such valuation produces a dominant ideal that leads with one-half of the narcissistic polarities: grandiosity, denigration of the other, and withdrawal from intimate connection. This is not to say that the other half is not present in those who live this dominant ideal, but rather that the ideal is to be omnipotent and to have no need for another. Dominant norms of femininity, at least before the feminist “revolution,” idealized the other narcissistic polarity: self-deprecation, idealization of the other (“You are perfect, and I am part of you” [Kohut 1971, p. 25]), and longings for merger.<sup>2</sup>

These coercive norms form the crucible in which we become male or female, no matter where we are located in social space (Layton 1998). For these norms are not only gender norms, but race and class norms as well. Working-class white women and middle-class black women grow up with norms particular to their social location, but, as Bourdieu (1984) and other social theorists have made clear, no social location exists without reference to all the others, and all create their own identities by taking up some cognitive and affective position toward dominant cultural ideals. Power hierarchies create and sustain differences that mark out what is high and low, good and bad, pure and impure, and there is certainly a general tendency for those not in power to internalize the denigrating attributions that come at them (see Dalal 2002; Moss 2003; White 2002).

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to think that norms are internalized without conflict (Layton 1998, 2004a). Because the hierarchies split and categorize human attributes and capacities, we find in the clinic and in our lives unceasing conflict between those unconscious processes that seek to maintain those splits and those

<sup>2</sup> Currently, dominant norms of femininity are in flux, and one recently articulated middle-class ideal, in fact, looks quite a bit like the dominant masculine norm of defensive autonomy (Layton 2004c, 2004d).

that refuse them. The ones that seek to maintain the splits are those that I call *normative unconscious processes*.

Normative unconscious processes refer to that aspect of the unconscious that pulls to repeat affect/behavior/cognition patterns that uphold the very social norms that cause psychic distress in the first place. Enactments occur when the therapist is unconsciously pulled by the same norms as those pulling the patient, or when the therapist is pulled by destructive norms. Such enactments are more easily unraveled if we are aware of these norms and how they operate. Let us return to the example of gender, in which we found the cultural mandate to split capacities for connection and dependence from capacities for agency and independence, and to gender the former as *female* and the latter as *male*. Such a mandate causes the very symptoms we treat: for example, it can make and has made women feel “unfemale” and hurtful to others when they pursue their own interests, and men feel “feminine” when they cry or express vulnerability. The alignment of, for example, femininity with dependence can be made conscious (the feminist movement accomplished this). When it comes to the impact of social hierarchies, however, what is unconscious and conflictual is produced from the way a culture or subculture’s inegalitarian norms psychologically (and performatively, via constant repetition) constitute dependence and independence. In U.S. culture, for example, sex, gender, class, and racial hierarchies produce a variety of social norms and ideologies that require the splitting of dependence from independence and the repudiation/devaluation of dependence that the dominant mode of enacting autonomy requires. Patients tend to have no idea that what they suffer from is the way they have split the two, *why* it is so difficult to feel like a man when feeling vulnerable, *why* it is so hard simultaneously to accomplish a sense of competence and a sense of connection.

My concept of normative unconscious processes differs from other views of the social unconscious in important ways. Dalal (2002), for example, distinguishes what is repressed from the hidden evaluations of people and things that we inherit by learning our language and its categories:

In contrast to the repressed . . . what is so powerful and perhaps insidious about these “*hidden evaluations*” which are *implicit*, is that *they slide into the psyche with no resistance* . . . . These hidden evaluations are nothing other than the social unconscious. [p. 130, italics in original]

In my view, these valuations do not slide into the psyche with no resistance—in fact, the familial and cultural transmission of racial as well as class, sex, and gender valuations is generally deeply conflictual, precisely *because* these categories are the products of splitting human capacities and needs. Our relational world is at least in part the ground of all of our *conflictual* internalizations of the class, race, gender, and sex antagonisms that structure society, internalizations that cause neurotic misery.

Normative unconscious processes, then, are one of the psychic forces that push to consolidate the “right” kind of identity and to obfuscate the workings of unequal power hierarchies. They protect the psychic splits that cultural norms mandate, and they do so because the risk of contesting them is loss of love and social approval. But let us not forget that the result of splitting is to keep what has been split off near. Repetition compulsions are the very place where the struggle between coercive normative unconscious processes and counternormative unconscious processes are enacted. And since all identities are relational and not individual possessions (in Dalal’s words, “who I am” really boils down to “where I belong” [2002, p. 187]), these repetitions are stirred up and played out in relationships.

In the clinic, then, we are likely to find patient and analyst engaging all the time in enactments of normative unconscious processes. The concept of normative unconscious processes usefully demonstrates the inextricable link between the psychic and the social: the regimes of power that define relations between the genders, between the races and classes, and between those with different sexual desires condition the very way we experience dependence and independence, separation and individuation, affects such as shame, and a host of other psychoanalytic staples not usually thought of in social terms.

*Race and Ethnicity: Psychoanalytic Views*

Psychoanalytic views of race differ depending on the way a school (or theorist) formulates its theory of aggression and its theory of what constitutes the self-other relation.<sup>3</sup> Dalal (2001) surveyed the psychoanalytic clinical literature on race and discovered that, in all cases, it was assumed that the differences between races are essential rather than constituted historically. None of the authors in his survey wondered, he notes, how “whites” come to be white. He found that there were two types of assumptions in the psychoanalytic literature: either that, deep down, we are all alike and culture is just an overlay; or that, deep down, we are all unique, and the social contaminates or swamps our uniqueness. In either case, culture is considered external to internal psychic functions.

Further, Dalal found that the actual fact of cultural racism was just about never taken into account as a cause of problems in the clinical psychoanalytic encounter. The patient is frequently assumed to be acting out infantile fantasies; at best, race becomes intertwined with those fantasies, but it is never determinant. Racism is conceptualized as an effect of individual prejudice, never as a cause of it. Dalal (2001) hypothesizes that external reality is kept out of psychoanalytic explanations of racial prejudice because of white guilt.

More recent clinical discussions of race do take external racism into account, and these often lead inexorably to discussions of the effects of trauma, particularly traumas that are unspoken but passed on intergenerationally (Apprey 1993; George 2001; Layton 2002; Volkan 2004; Walls 2006).<sup>4</sup> The hatred involved in

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent summary of psychoanalytic theories of race, see Dalal 2002, chapter 2.

<sup>4</sup> George (2001) argues that African Americans may cling defensively to racial identity in order to *avoid* dealing with the unsymbolized trauma of slavery. According to George's Lacanian schema, racial identities function all too frequently to suture the gap in subjectivity caused by the trauma of slavery. The unsymbolized trauma in the Real gives rise to repetition. While racial identity can be used to further a progressive politics when acknowledged as socially constructed and provisional, racial identity too frequently is used defensively to foreclose the mourning necessary to work through trauma.



racist policies and racist projections tends to issue forth in all the well-known sequelae of trauma: intense shame and self-hatred, splitting, dissociation, suicidal or homicidal wishes, to name some of these (Walls 2006; White 2002). Herman (1992) writes that the psychic consequences of trauma often result in a three-part internal structure that includes the positions of victim, perpetrator, and rescuer. As the clinical vignette I will present suggests, it is important always to keep all three positions in mind as we work—as well as the ways in which all three will be stirred in us.

Clinicians influenced by poststructuralist antiracism walk the fine line between skepticism toward the category of “race” and respect for the fact that the “fiction” of racial difference is nonetheless a traumatic, lived reality, because of the forces of racism and the many possible responses to them. Leary (1995, 1997) and Altman (2000) have both argued compellingly that, whether or not it is spoken about, race is always in the room when the dyad is interracial, and the analyst who does not bring it up risks avoiding difficult but likely present material. The trauma of racism affects both “victims” and “perpetrators” alike. It affects each differently, but as Altman’s (2000) clinical example demonstrates, victim and perpetrator are psychically connected, and the two roles are easily reversed.

In my own clinical experience, I have at times found it useful to bring up race, or at least race privilege, even when patient and analyst are both white (Layton 2006). On the other hand, Dalal (2002) asserts (with reference to voluminous data on the historicity of the processes of racialization) that racism historically preceded the concept of race, and, in his view, *any* reference to race assumes a basis for differentiation of races that is spurious (see also Kovel 1988).<sup>5</sup> If we take this to be true, then bringing up race in therapy is as complicated as pretending that it is not

<sup>5</sup> Dalal (2002) writes that “the terms race, ethnicity and culture are all *names* for differences” (p. 23, italics in original). In his view, the very function of differentiation, usually hidden, is to naturalize power relations. He urges us to look not at difference but at the function of difference, and why any given difference gets “heated up” at particular times.

there, for what exactly *is* racial difference? While physical distinctions might anchor our notions of racial difference, what it actually is, in its oppressive mode, has to do with the power to split asunder human capacities and to call some *white* and others *non-white*. It has to do with an ideological means of maintaining power differentials, of assigning, as Bourdieu (1984) might say, distinction to one group of people and a lack of distinction—or, at best, second classness—to others.

As Dalal (2002) notes, citing Elias (1991), words and categories carry embedded emotions, and the positive or negative valence of words and categories derives from power relations: “Emotions are evoked and utilized to fulfill functions of differentiation . . . . The emotions are a *technique* that is exploited in the task of differentiation, and not the ‘cause’ of differentiation that they are mistakenly taken to be” (Dalal 2002, p. 131, italics in original). When we look more closely at the content of racial splitting (as I shall in the vignette discussed later in this paper), we find all sorts of effects of these splitting processes: among others, cognitive effects, effects in the way attachment and agency are defined and valued, and effects in emotional states, expression, and range.

On the other hand, drawing again on the negotiation model of identity, racial difference also has to do with whatever the people labeled as *racially other*—i.e., nonwhite—collectively and individually have fashioned historically from being so labeled. Where I differ from many determinist views on identity is in my sense that racial identities and the relation between dominant and subordinate identities are not closed systems; subordinate groups’ identities are never fully determined by the power of dominant groups. As Hall (1982) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985) assert, elaborating on Gramsci’s (1971) concept of hegemony, social and political life in modernity involves a ceaseless struggle between subordinate and dominant groups over the power to define precisely such constructs as *race*.

Thus, aspects of the identities that nonwhite groups fashion for themselves are healthy, at times psychologically healthier than the psychic states of those who identify with the split cultural ideals

of whiteness. Leary (1995, 1997) and Altman (2000) persuasively argue that, because of racism and the different living conditions it entails, blacks and whites in U.S. culture see the same phenomena quite differently, another argument for the need to address racial difference in the clinical setting. Dalal's theory of race, which implies that calling attention to race is itself racist, suggests that we cannot avoid racist enactments in the clinic, no matter what we do: we enact racializing processes when we bring racial difference into the consulting room, as well as when we deny the significance of such differences.

In the vignette below, I explore this problem via a series of enactments with an Asian American patient, one with whom normative unconscious processes pulled me, all too comfortably, into a position of *whiteness*. After examining the clinical significance of the ambivalence of stereotypes, I will go on to discuss the increasing discomfort I felt with this patient as I explored what I considered to be his tendency to self-abnegation. And, finally, I look at the patient's struggle to know what love is, a struggle that showed the ways that love—as well as many other constructs that analysts rarely think of in cultural terms—is itself racialized. The interactions I have selected reveal as well the way that race intersects with gender, class, and sexuality.

## CLINICAL VIGNETTE

Michael was a gay, Asian American male in his mid-thirties who entered therapy because he could not get his former boyfriend, who was white and middle class, out of his mind. The patient was worried that this would get in the way of his new relationship, and hoped that therapy, which he had never done before, might help him extirpate disturbing thoughts of the ex-boyfriend, particularly the compulsion to compare himself unfavorably to the ex and to feel socially inept in relation to him. Michael had long felt socially inept, and at least part of the origin of this feeling was that his mother, who strongly valued family and education, did not let him have much of a social life outside the family. He was expected to focus single-mindedly on schoolwork.

His mother and father had emigrated from Asia to a suburb of a big city while in their early twenties, and Michael considered many of his thoughts and feelings to be products of his non-Western culture—and he valued them as such. Nonetheless, he felt that he had problems with self-esteem and hoped that therapy might help with that. At the same time, he was clearly conflicted about being in therapy from the outset. It seems that one of the ways his parents had differentiated themselves from “Westerners” was by feeling superior about their capacity to be private people; Westerners, the parents felt, talk too loudly, too publicly, and too long about their private business. They also make far too much of their emotions. Michael often thought so, too.

Michael’s lived experience illustrates the splitting, and, in this case, racializing and nationalizing, of human capacities: In the family, emotion and rationality were split off and labeled *Western* and *non-Western*, respectively. This is not the way capacities are usually split by dominant Western groups, to be sure, but if the parents saw their best shot at success in being rational and scientific, then it served them psychologically to distinguish themselves from the other in terms of superior rationality. Yet, how much more complex these things are than they first appear. It turned out that Michael’s mother could herself become highly “irrational” at times—yelling, screaming, and imposing rules that to Michael made no sense. Ironically, this only heightened Michael’s identification with rationality and against emotion.<sup>6</sup>

In high school, Michael was aware of longings to be part of the white in-crowd, but he also joined his Asian friends in denigrating the popular kids’ practices—for example, derisively noting that whites seemed to keep switching romantic partners, but only took

<sup>6</sup> Note that I refer to “rationality,” not reason. I do so because I want to emphasize that split polarities tend to be monstrous versions of what they claim to be. As Freud (1915) once said of repression, the content of what is repressed does not remain what it was when originally repressed. Rather, it “proliferates in the dark . . . and takes on extreme forms of expression” (p. 149). This is true of what is split and dissociated as well, so that when I say emotion and reason are split, I want to make it clear that the result of the split will always be pathological versions of what I take to be the usual human capacities for emotion and reason.

partners of the same racial group. Michael figured that he was the only one of the Asian kids who longed to be part of the white crowd; as he told me, it would not be logical for the Asian kids to denigrate something that they really desired to join. (Here I gently noted that this was precisely what he was doing, and perhaps logic is not always all that it is cracked up to be.) Because of his longings, Michael must have felt a certain degree of alienation from his friends as well, which exacerbated his feeling of being socially inept. What was striking about his ambivalent place between Asians and Caucasians, East and West, was that it left him quite uncertain—both about what he felt, and about the value of what he felt, for it pulled him into denigrating the very things he longed for.

From my first sessions with Michael, I saw two grids begin to form, one that associated certain attributes with white Westerners and others to superior Asians, and another that denigrated Asians and idealized white Westerners. These stereotypes were not just racial and ethnic; they were nodal points that stitched together race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Michael and I were both aware of the grids, and, at one point, he laughed and said, “I rely on stereotypes a lot, don’t I?”

I invoke Michael’s story because his way of splitting and racializing attributes, sometimes with whiteness in the superior position, sometimes in the inferior, stirred a lot of thought and feeling in me and a lot of questions about how best to work with him. It also kept me conscious of my own ways of categorizing and judging, and made me wary of some of the certainties with which I found myself operating. The therapy raised a number of issues about the way intersecting identity categories are lived and the way power differentials create differences: differences in emotional range and expression, in the relation between emotion and cognition, in modes of separation and attachment, in one’s very experience of love. I do not take Michael to be representative of Asian Americans in general;<sup>7</sup> rather, I draw on our work together to

<sup>7</sup> I am well aware that Japanese Americans, for example, do not have the same background as Chinese or Indian Americans, although, to preserve confidentiality, I obscure those differences at certain points in the paper.

explore in more depth the way ideologies of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality intersect and are lived and enacted in treatment.

As I mentioned earlier, Michael both idealized and denigrated Caucasians, which put me now in a superior, now in an inferior, position. Although he was conscious of his tendency to stereotype, what was unconscious for Michael was the splitting upon which this rested, and the trauma that caused the splitting in the first place. Splitting and projection may be universal mechanisms of defense, but racism creates the wounds that marshal such defenses, and it is within a racist field that people enact the repetitions that simultaneously keep the wounds fresh and seek to heal them (Dalal 2002; Layton 2002).

Michael's ex-boyfriend (who was in fact a mid-level corporate employee and not a higher executive, as the patient's admiration had implied) incarnated in Michael's fantasy everything that Michael was not: he was handsome, dashing, well dressed, athletic, a corporate success, and, most important, socially suave and popular. Michael's attraction was clearly a mix of sexual desire and the desire to have what he thought the ex-boyfriend had. To be the right kind of male in Michael's economy, one had to be white. The fantasied ideal of whiteness that organized his desire was upper class, worldly, popular, and—as the ex-boyfriend was not fully comfortable self-identifying as gay—at least semi-straight and homophobic.

Michael denigrated what he thought of as Asian masculinity, and did not think he could be attracted to an Asian male. He felt that neither white men, the ones worth having, nor Asian men were attracted to Asian men. At the same time, he and his Asian friends had disdain for what was seen as his ex-boyfriend's culture of self-serving, false sincerity. As Bourdieu (1984) noted, one of the central mechanisms of the aspect of identity formation built on a repudiation of otherness is to claim virtue for whatever social group one finds oneself in (thus, the title of Bourdieu's book, *Distinction*).

Michael's Asian friends served the function of asking, "Who wants to be white, anyway?" Whites are selfish. Indeed, the patient's

ex and his friends pretended to be concerned for others, Michael said, but, really, they were always manipulating social scenes to get what they wanted. Michael even complained that his current, loving boyfriend had that white Western way of thinking of himself first. For example, in restaurants, Michael observed, his white friends would pour water or tea for themselves when they wanted it, whereas he and other Asians he knew would always pour for everyone else first, and for themselves last. So here was yet another stereotype: that white Westerners are self-absorbed and Asians more polite and considerate of others.

### *The Ambivalence of the Stereotype*

While the content of Michael's beliefs and observations is important and tells us the way that he and his family split and racialized human capacities, I want first to look at the form the stereotyping took: the oscillating idealization and denigration. Michael's conflicts and the way stereotypes functioned for him as pseudo-solutions resonate with, and even extend, recent theorizing about the ambivalence of the stereotype.

Writing in a Lacanian frame about colonial discourse, Bhabha (1994) argues that stereotypes function as fetishes: they attempt to fix a signifier to a signified, to a particular meaning (e.g., blacks are animals, Jews are cheap), and so deny the fact that signifiers are always open to multiple signifieds, and that identities can never be fixed. Subjectivity ceaselessly disrupts identity categories because it is, by nature, split by the existence of the unconscious and the unsymbolizable. (That split between meaning and being is what Lacan [1998] refers to as *castration*.) The fetish-stereotype operates in the narcissistic economy of the Lacanian Imaginary, the register in which the ego itself comes into being.

In this Lacanian economy, the child of eighteen months of age or so sees an image of itself that appears as a coherent whole. Yet, the child experiences the self as a fragmentary and chaotic jumble. The child identifies with this coherent version of self, the ideal ego. For Lacan, then, the ego is founded on the misrecognition that we are not castrated. We know that we *are* castrated

beings, and yet we disavow it by trying to fix ourselves in seamless identities. If we have the power to do so, we use whatever is at our disposal—scientific knowledge, gender dominance, consumer goods—to deny the fact that subjectivity is essentially split, that the ego is not in control. Whatever reminds us of our fragmentary nature stirs aggression, narcissistic rage.

Stereotypes issue from the mind of the colonizer, who, for psychic reassurance, renders the other the same, all the time knowing that the other is different, and attempts to eradicate otherness in the self. To sustain the disavowal, the colonizer must not give the other a chance to speak. For when the other speaks, the fixity of signification that the colonizer seeks to impose (in, for example, colonialist ideologies of what blacks are like) is revealed to be fictional. The oscillation between knowing and not knowing is thus central to colonial discourse, which fantasizes the other as knowable and same, and yet is aware that the other is different and thus poses a challenge to attempts to fix him/her within the stereotyped grids of dominant discourse. The other's difference, and acknowledging differences within the self, are both threats to the colonizer's fantasy of wholeness and sameness.

Bhabha (1994) exemplifies the way that colonizer and colonized become co-implicated in colonial discourse via a well-known "scene" in *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon 1967, pp. 109-114). In this account, told in the first person, a child on a train sees Fanon and says to his mother, "Look, a nigger" (p. 109). At first amused, Fanon then becomes increasingly disturbed as he feels his humanness evaporate, his multiplicity as a man reduced to only a "black body" (what he calls a *racialized epidermal schema*). He shivers from cold. The boy, unconscious of his own aggression, now interprets the shiver as a shiver of rage, and, suddenly, he is frightened of the black man, scared that the "nigger" is going to eat him up. For Bhabha (following Lacan), the shaky ground upon which the bourgeois ego forms ensures that the attempt to deny or dominate difference will unleash continued aggression against both self and other.

Writing in a Kleinian frame about the relation between African Americans and whites, Balbus (2004) argues that the domi-



nant version of whiteness in the U.S. requires that whites split off emotion from reason, body from mind, nature from culture. Blackness becomes the container of what is split off from whiteness. Balbus maintains that white stereotypes of blacks yield significant evidence that whites both love and hate blacks, and that whites have tremendous guilt about what they have historically done to blacks in this country. The guilt, however, is not expressed in making reparation; rather, structural racism causes depressive anxiety at every phase of development—oral, anal, genital—to issue in the regressive splitting and projection characteristic of paranoid-schizoid relating. The stereotypes that whites develop about blacks at each developmental level reflect the split between unintegrated love and hate.

Balbus (2004) catalogues some of the contradictory evaluations in white stereotypes of blacks, including white perceptions that blacks are “lazy and shiftless,” but “laid back and cool”; that they are denigrated as “animals,” while being simultaneously idealized as “natural athletes.” Balbus argues that reparations, monetary ones, would be symbolic of an emotional reparation in which, rather than continue to split, whites would acknowledge the harm they have done to blacks and deal with the anxiety and guilt produced by this knowledge. His argument is that the taking back of white projections is crucial to the well-being not just of blacks, but also of whites themselves.

In essence, I come to the same conclusion as these writers, that the nature of the stereotype is ambivalent, but I come to it from a different psychoanalytic frame, for I locate ambivalence as deriving neither from an originary destructive instinct, nor from an originary split in our feelings about the breast/parent, nor from an originary refusal to acknowledge limits and loss. I derive it rather from racism: from the fact that dominant identity categories are defined by dividing up into binary pairs the human capacities and attributes that can only develop and thrive in tandem, such as dependence and independence, connection and agency, emotion and reason. Such dividing determines the ways in which we love, hate, create. And the reason why such divides exist has little to

do with human nature. Rather, they exist so that those in power, those with the power to define the proper identity, stay in power.

The oscillation between denigration and idealization that marks my patient Michael's stereotyping is characteristic of narcissism, and it is part of my argument that racism and other cultural inequalities produce not just narcissistic injury, but narcissistic character and defenses as well. Michael frequently got caught in his web of projections, now disdaining what he in fact longed for, now disdaining what he felt he was. Is the fantasy behind the stereotyping process one of a "lost" wholeness that no one ever can or did attain (Bhabha 1994)? Is the love-hate relationship with whiteness rooted in originary destructive and libidinal drives, torn asunder by racism (Balbus 2004)?

I suggest that fantasies of lost wholeness and racist-driven splitting and projection arise from the ashes of racist-driven narcissistic wounding, which leads us to seek a place, a fantasy space, where we might no longer be vulnerable to hurt, humiliation, and isolation. Michael's ex-boyfriend, who incarnated whiteness and whose rejection of Michael only made him more desirable, represented such a fantasy space for Michael. In this fantasy space, which Michael resisted relinquishing with all his might, he would either be loved by the ex or would himself be more like the ex—and he would never again feel the pain of inferiority.

### *Whiteness*

For Bhabha (1994) and others (e.g., George 2001), the colonial ideal ego is white, and whatever threatens one's claim to whiteness is apt to unleash anxiety and aggression. A major stake of discourses that reinforce racial difference is to define who can lay claim to whiteness/wholeness and who cannot. In their article on racial melancholia, Eng and Han (2002) argue that different stereotypes haunt Asian Americans from those that haunt African Americans. These authors focus specifically on the psychic effects of the model-minority stereotype. In their view, many middle-class or upwardly mobile Asians become melancholic because to be successful in white America often requires a rejection of part of who

they are. Further, Eng and Han assert that, while Asian Americans can become wealthy and successful in their fields, they can never become white; if the inclusion that comes with whiteness is what they covet, the psychic mission is doomed to failure.

My patient Michael felt that he had the wrong attributes, including body type, to be the right kind of man. The love that Michael felt for his ex-boyfriend reminded me of the psychic positions Benjamin identified in *The Bonds of Love* (1988), the ones I referred to earlier as versions of narcissism. For, in that relationship, Michael had taken up the self-denying, submissive position typical of dominant white femininity in its relation to dominant white masculinity. Again, his wish seemed to echo the Kohutian formula, "You are perfect and I am part of you" (Kohut 1971).

All this felt fairly obvious to me, and I believed that, in the course of therapy, Michael would probably come to see that he did not so much want the ex-boyfriend as he wanted what this man represented that he himself lacked. What was less obvious to me until later was that, in the many interchanges about his desire, Michael had put me in—and I had unconsciously assumed—the position of *the white one*. While it is certainly true that in our particular historical moment, I am called and call myself *white* (as opposed to historical moments when Jews were considered nonwhite), and while it is true that I have many of the privileges of whiteness, it is also true, as Lacan (1977, 1998) might have said, that whiteness embodies a fantasy of wholeness to which *no one* can lay claim.

The pretense to incarnating whiteness is precisely the kind of normative unconscious process that sustains racial inequality. What might be termed my unconscious wish to occupy the position of what I would call invulnerability (rather than wholeness)—a collusion with Michael's wish—demonstrates that racism and class inequality not only split the psyche of the subordinate; they also bolster the fantasmatic position of the dominant, and *both* parties want to hold to the fantasy that—again, as Lacan might say—*someone* has the phallus (see the discussion of Bhabha 1994, above) and is invulnerable to pain and loss.

It seems to me important to think about how, technically, we might deal with the splitting inherent to racial categories without fostering a fantasy of wholeness. It was while listening to a talk by Leary (2003) one evening that I suddenly realized I had that very day adopted the position of whiteness vis-à-vis my patient. Michael and I had been talking about the psychic function that his ex-boyfriend had served for him, the connection to whiteness that that relationship brought him, and I recall saying something like, "And you can never be white." Thinking of the Eng and Han (2002) article, I recall adding to myself something like: "Poor guy. He'll never be white and he shall have to mourn that."

Once aware of my collusion with the norm that splits white and nonwhite, however, I began to ask different kinds of questions: For example, what was whiteness to him, what was desirable about the attributes he associated with it, and how had these attributes fallen into the category of *not-me*? More importantly, I asked Michael if he was assuming I was white and what that meant to him. While acknowledging the privilege I have from the fact that I am associated with whiteness, I yet tried to transmute the categories of *white* and *Asian* into what they stood for in a racialized culture and in his racialized imagination. In consequence, at the same time that whiteness as a narcissistic structure was either denigrated or idealized, there arose a third space of whiteness in which Michael used the fantasy that his ex-boyfriend and I "held whiteness," in order to be able to explore what he had coveted and what he had shut himself off from in life.

### *On Politeness and Self-Absorption, Emotion, and Reason*

And now I will turn to the content of the stereotypes and how that content played out in treatment. On numerous occasions, Michael's therapy not only confronted me with my own stereotypes, but it also rendered both conscious and problematic some of the assumptions of health that I have held, assumptions that also get enacted unconsciously in treatment and that serve to sustain a particular power status quo.

As I mentioned earlier, Michael's Western/non-Western binary construct at times seemed to take the form of what I was familiar with as a male/female binary. One day, he told me that his ex-boyfriend had pointed out to him that whenever Michael walked down the street and someone came toward him in the opposite direction, it was always Michael who deferred and moved to the side. Michael also sometimes wondered why he did not feel anger in situations in which he knew his Western friends would be angry. He often noted that Westerners seemed angry a lot—for example, they would say they were having a bad day, rather than merely that some random thing had not worked out. In other words, he felt Westerners had an irrational way of seeing nonpersonal events—like bad weather—as personal.

More than once, I found myself thinking that, if Michael had been a white female and told me some of the things he did, I would have known right away that we were dealing with problems with self-assertion. But what made me less certain, for this case and perhaps for all, was that I happened to read an article by Rothblum et al. (2000) that brought to my attention the possibility that some of the tension in the therapy, Michael's ongoing discomfort with being in therapy, might have something to do with my conscious and unconscious assumptions and how I was enacting them.

Rothblum et al. argue that the basic tenets of attachment theory—for example, that secure attachment promotes freedom to explore—are not universal, but rather are the product of Western psychological assumptions. Contrasting Western with Japanese child-rearing practices, they note that, while Western parents encourage their children to assert themselves, to figure out what they need and ask for it, Japanese parents tend to anticipate the child's needs and fears, to create an environment in which needs are met without the child's having to ask. The Japanese mother, they argue, fosters emotional closeness, while the Western mother fosters exploration and autonomy. Where the Western ideal of competence values getting what one needs for one's self, versus depending on others to meet one's needs, in Japanese child-rearing practices, the focus is on coordinating one's needs with the needs

of others. In the West, babies are encouraged to explore and to be oriented to the environment; in Japan, babies explore less and are encouraged to be more oriented to their mothers, more dependent. While in the West, value is placed on linking attachment and exploration, in Japan, the primary link is between attachment and dependence. This serves the Japanese value of accommodation or social fittedness. "These terms," the authors write, "refer to children's empathy with others, their compliance with others' wishes, and their responsiveness to social cues and norms" (Rothblum et al. 2000, p. 1099).

For Michael, many things made therapy difficult, not least of which was the idea that he was supposed to start the sessions. He told me that he felt he was being "pushy" to talk just about himself; it made him feel as though he were intruding on me. I would interpret this as a problem with self-assertion, but perhaps it was not that at all! And yet, as someone caught between two cultures, it was obvious that Michael struggled, just as Eng and Han (2002) suggest, between being like a Westerner and being like his family.

Am I, then, to be the cultural agent that makes Michael more comfortable operating within Western norms, in effect taking a side of the conflict? Or is my job merely to point out the diverse norms, the conflict, and let Michael find his own path? Consciously, I believe my job is the latter, but I fear I fairly frequently perform the former, relying on the ideals of health that my Western training has championed, ideals incorporated not only in technique, but even in the treatment frame. I suppose one could argue that such performances are conscious, for, after all, I can articulate what the ideals are. But it is my view that, even while the ideals may be conscious, the splitting and devaluation they rest on are not. Repeatedly performing the norms of my profession, I maintain the approval/love of my peers while sustaining a certain distribution of power.

Then one day, Michael presents a dilemma he has with his current boyfriend. Michael doesn't really know whether or not he loves him; he knows that he himself is loved, but that's not enough. I ask him what his feelings are. He says that he knows he

loves his parents because he wants them to be happy, and wants to do what he can to make them happy. Is that a feeling, he asks? I float the hypothesis that there is something that inhibits him from feeling and knowing what he feels, and I think it has to do with the way feelings have been identified as *Western* and *bad*. He repeats his sense that Westerners react out of proportion to the cause when bad things happen, and he is glad that he doesn't do this. But sometimes he would like to get angry—and he's not sure he should. In fact, he does feel angry sometimes; and then he mentions a new game he's playing with himself, where he waits a little longer before moving out of the way when someone walks toward him on the street. He guesses that, because his ex-boyfriend remarked on the fact that he always moves out of the way first, he now thinks there must be something wrong with this behavior. But he does get angry that others don't step out of the way—it's not fair, and it's rude. He's glad he's like he is—but is he getting stepped on?

I struggled in this treatment because my working hypothesis, based on some things Michael said that showed a desire to express more emotion, was that the whole Western/non-Western thing was one way in which he kept himself inhibited, kept himself from integrating emotion and reason. I also felt that his mother's yelling fits, sometimes paired with humiliation-engendering behavior, made emotion frightening for him. And yet, I certainly agreed with him that Western forms of assertion (or, at least, their U.S. East Coast version) often crossed the line into rudeness and incivility.

At one point, I spoke to Michael about some of my confusions. He was talking about the fun he had had during the past weekend with a visiting friend, a man who laughed a lot at Michael's jokes. He remarked that he generally felt responsible for showing his guests a good time, without focusing on whether he himself was having a good time. Because I again read this as self-abnegation, I brought up the confusions I had been feeling about the Western/non-Western dichotomization. I told him I was concerned that, like the ex-boyfriend, I might have been pathologiz-

ing something about these values of civility and duty that guided his behavior, and I told him that my therapy culture tends to understand some of these ways of being as self-abnegation.

I mentioned I was pretty sure that, if I were treating a Western female, I would move in the direction of seeing such behavior as self-abnegating. I said, "I suppose what matters is whether or not you find that these ways of being get in your way; do *you* want things to be different?"

Michael then revisited some of the examples he saw of Western rudeness, and in the new rendition, matters were more complicated, more East-West: he said that, when he pours tea, he is aware that if there isn't much in the pot, he might not get any; this does, in fact, bother him. Indeed, he said that the responsibility to make others happy was also self-focused: if his friend did not like what he thought would constitute a good time, he would feel devalued as well as guilty.

He then noted how frequently his ex-boyfriend used to leave him alone at parties, and how the boyfriend would rationalize his behavior by asserting a value on independence and a disdain for clinginess. But, Michael said, "I told him more than once that I was uncomfortable in those situations, and he shouldn't have left me alone."

"Indeed," I replied, and realized at the same time that this was not about which value system was right; it was about being in tune with your partner, conscious of his vulnerabilities.

At this point, I decided to ask Michael if he might be having any feelings about my upcoming vacation, since he had mentioned being left alone. The rest of the session focused on his question of whether or not he really needed therapy: he associated to the first therapist he saw, the one who had referred him to me over a year earlier, and expressed a feeling that her office was much more conveniently located than mine, and that he would be glad to be able to sleep in while I was gone, and to think, in my absence, about whether he should stop therapy.

He then associated to his friend's girlfriend as not being very good-looking, even though the friend himself was quite attractive.



And when I asked what this might have to do with what had come before, he concluded the sequence by saying that his new boyfriend didn't think he really needed therapy. "I think the issues I have, a lot of people have—and I don't think others are in therapy with such issues." I thought to myself that this expression of his discomfort with therapy related to all of what had come before, about what was Western, what was not. I said to Michael, both defensively and nondefensively, that many are in therapy for just the issues he has brought. And then he told me that he would not pay my fee if his insurance were not paying, and he felt guilty about that; he had just learned that his insurance coverage would end in two months' time.

This material is so full of suggestive moments that I almost hesitate to offer an interpretation. But my best guess is that Michael may have felt wounded when I suggested a connection between his psychology and that of Western femininity. Had I inadvertently feminized this Asian man who was already sensitive to the feminizing stereotype—both as a gay man and as an Asian man? Perhaps he then wanted to point out to me that he really is much more assertive and self-focused, more masculine, than I think. Perhaps the next association, about abandonment, did not have as much to do with my impending vacation as with the way I had wounded him. Like his ex-boyfriend, I perhaps should have known that what I said would make him uncomfortable.

I venture this guess because the material that came after, about whether or not he should quit therapy and whether or not it was worth paying for, had a somewhat hostile edge. It was also not lost on me that the therapist whom he had first seen was not only closer to his home, but was also quite young and beautiful—was he perhaps trying to wound me by questioning *my* femininity?

At the same time, Michael's conflict about therapy had other roots as well. A major issue with his current boyfriend was that the boyfriend did not seem to value processing, and Michael was coming more and more to see how much he himself *did* value it. I believe that he found his desire for insight somewhat taboo, and perhaps even associated it with the degraded feminine as well as the degraded Western.

*What Is Love?*

I conclude my discussion of this vignette with another theme that Michael struggled with during the therapy: the question, what is love? Not only was this a presenting problem, but I also invoke it here to demonstrate how the constructs we tend to see as most universal and psychological, least culturally inflected, are in many ways simultaneously psychically *and* socially constructed.

Earlier, I noted that Michael did not feel sure he was in love with his current partner, and I also noted that he felt he was not very desirable—a feeling the ex-boyfriend heightened, but that the current boyfriend completely contradicted. The current boyfriend had only had two other partners in his life, and both were Asian. My patient wondered about white men who only desire Asians—he averred that, generally, only fat and old white men were into Asians. And Michael wondered why he was never attracted to Asian men either.

Countless works of fiction convince me that love is a social construct as well as a feeling, and that racism can destroy or severely interfere with the capacity for love. No work, perhaps, gets at the socially constructed nature of love better than does *M. Butterfly* (Hwang 1989). In this play, a white French diplomat, Gallimard, falls passionately in love with a person whom he thinks is a diminutive, female, Asian opera singer whom he has heard sing the title role in *Madame Butterfly*. She tells him the tragic story of the American sailor who seduced and then abandoned the Japanese Butterfly, who, in her desperation, committed suicide. And then she taunts Gallimard for finding the story beautiful. In a powerful speech, she underscores the way power relations infuse love:

It's one of your favorite fantasies, isn't it? The submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man . . . Consider it this way: what would you say if a blonde homecoming queen fell in love with a short Japanese businessman? He treats her cruelly, then goes home for three years, during which time she prays to his picture and turns down marriage from a young Kennedy. Then, when

she learns he has remarried, she kills herself. Now I believe you would consider this girl to be a deranged idiot, correct? But because it's an Oriental who kills herself for a Westerner—ah!—you find it beautiful. [Hwang 1989, p. 17]

And yet, this is just what the play enacts, the revenge of the short, thin, Asian male against the white Westerner. Having fallen madly in love with his Butterfly, Gallimard learns that the object of his love is actually a transvestite Asian male. Desperate to preserve the fantasy of true heterosexual love, where men are dominant and women submissive, Gallimard transforms himself into the female Asian Butterfly—and kills him-/herself for love.

And no writer perhaps better shows the damaging toll that racism takes on love than Toni Morrison. In one of her short stories, "Recitatif" (1983), two girls, one black and one white, are left at an orphanage because their mothers cannot care for them. One mother is physically ill; the other is mentally ill. We do not know which girl is black and which white, and Morrison, mixing up signifiers of class and race, makes her readers face our own racial stereotypes as we frantically try to figure out who is black and who is white. But the story moves us through the girls' lives and shows us how, at every historical point, racism frustrates their possibility of refinding the mutual care and protectiveness that they once shared, when, on first meeting, each recognized in the other the vulnerability caused by maternal abandonment.

Such literary works suggest the reasons why Michael could love only white men, especially those who could not or would not be sexual with him. As the therapy went on, his membership in a gay, Asian activist organization seemed to decrease his homophobia, and he began to be attracted to men from certain Asian subcultures other than his own. It seemed to me that here was an example of the way that essentialist categories and identity politics can, in fact, facilitate growth, and can defeat internalized racist and sexist prejudice.

But there is more to the story of love and ethnicity in this case. For Michael, love was less a feeling than a sense of duty. He

came to understand that the passion he experienced for his ex-boyfriend had to do with the other man's remaining inaccessible and rejecting. Michael's only experiences of passion were on that model of unrequited love. (My interpretation was that his desire was fueled by his wish to have what the fantasied ex-boyfriend seemed to have.) Otherwise, of love, he knew only that he loved his parents, because he wanted them to be happy and because they had sacrificed themselves for him. He wanted to sacrifice for them in return, and he called that love. At the beginning of his therapy, he reported that he only cried in movies during scenes of parent-child love, never those of adult-adult love. In his view, adult-adult love was never pure, because, merely by desiring the other, "you are asking for something back for your love."

During the treatment, I was never sure whether Michael simply did not love his current boyfriend, and was at best enjoying how much this man loved him, or if we were dealing with an inability to love that had to do with several other factors: the inhibition of feeling and of behaving "irrationally"; the self-denigration and internalized homophobia ("I don't want to be a member of any club that wants me as a member"); and the confusion that seemed always to ensue when the other knew what s/he wanted of him. Indeed, it seemed to me that the legacy of Michael's mother's insistent presence—which he experienced as love, but also as control—was to make him unsure of what he felt whenever the other *was* sure. I thought that the constraints on his freedom that he had so disliked while growing up had become rationalized as a "true" kind of love, a selfless love.

And then I came across a paper on filial piety in Chinese culture (Gu 2006). The author of this paper argued that the Oedipus in this culture is different from the Western Oedipus. Specifically, it is marked by a loyalty between parent and child that transcends the loyalty between spouses. Once again, I was decentered by the recognition that my patient's desire was not simply defensive, and perhaps only defensive when seen from within my particular frame. Am I so jaded that selfless love seems absurd to me? I certainly did not hear his rendition of his mother's love as selfless;

to me, it seemed that her sacrifices were as much aimed at having her son achieve what she and her husband could not, as they were about her son being happy. But I suppose I should ask: what's happiness got to do with it? Is the idea that we are meant to be happy yet another Western value?

I leave the reader with my confusion rather than with any attempts at answers.

## CONCLUSION

This summary of my work with Michael gives some sense of the way that racist hierarchies create racial identities that are marked by oscillating idealizing and devaluing dynamics characteristic of narcissism. Norms of race, class, gender, and sexuality, norms transmitted within familial and cultural enclaves of love and hate (P. Williams 1997), are unconsciously enacted and further legitimized in the very way we assert ourselves in the world and in the very way we connect with others. As Altman (2000) has argued, clinicians have to assume that their racism pervades the clinical encounter in some way; I hope to have shown here some of the ways that patient and therapist enact the norms that split and racialize emotion and reason, dependence and independence, love and hate.

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## MAPPING RACISM

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*The author uses the metaphor of mapping to illuminate a structural feature of racist thought, locating the degraded object along vertical and horizontal axes. These axes establish coordinates of hierarchy and of distance. With the coordinates in place, racist thought begins to seem grounded in natural processes. The other's identity becomes consolidated, and parochialism results. The use of this kind of mapping is illustrated via two patient vignettes. The author presents Freud's (1905, 1927) views in relation to such a "mapping" process, as well as Adorno's (1951) and Baldwin's (1965). Finally, the author conceptualizes the crucial status of primitivity in the workings of racist thought.*

## INTRODUCTION

For nearly 100 years, American psychoanalysis, under the influence of a variety of forces—commercial and intellectual, ethical and political—has slowly found ways to identify, resist, and undo the deforming weight of its parochial, heterosexual male origins. Individually and organizationally, we have thereby become more cosmopolitan, more worldly. We have seen theory and practice reshaped not only from the inside—by force of clinical experience or conceptual inconsistency—but also from the outside, by the determining—and, in this case, the progressive—forces of history. In recent decades, these historical forces have been particularly effective—and particularly noticeable—as we have begun

the long task of dismantling the homophobic and misogynist foundations that have constituted an important part of our legacy.

As for the deformations inherent in our parochial whiteness, however, we have remained peculiarly stuck. As a result of forces that we have yet to even name, let alone to counter, we work in a professional environment that is essentially segregated from people and cultures of color, deprived of contact with them. Within that environment, there are scant signs of either influence or infiltration by what, to the racial category of *white*, exists as the racial category *other*. We have yet to effectively listen to that other.

I am thinking here of “effectively listening” in perhaps its strongest sense, as a transforming experience of reception, akin to the listening we do clinically. Listening psychoanalytically entails not only hearing what the other has said, but also, and more importantly, noting how what was said has made its way into us, and, in its passage, has changed us. In listening to the other, we invite the other to take up a location inside of us. Listening, in effect, moves the object from an external location to an internal one.

Since we have yet to find ourselves in sustained, mutually influential/mutually transformative contact with peoples and cultures of color, American clinical psychoanalysis remains parochially white. Our clinical credo holds up here: actual experience is a necessary, though not sufficient, precondition for change. While imagined experiences with a charged object may produce revealing and helpful dreams, daydreams, and symptoms, if neither acted upon nor interpreted, such experiences do little to destabilize the status quo. Parochialism cannot be successfully overcome by acts of imagination alone.

## THE TENACITY OF PAROCHIALISM

Our explosively multicultural historical surround provides us with abundant opportunity to counter our parochialism, but, in the face of that opportunity, we seem to be hunkering down more than opening up. Note the stark contrast between the explicit multi-

cultural ethos of academic psychoanalysis and the relative indifference to that ethos that seems characteristic of clinical analysis. The only cultural group whose historically grounded pain has won our continuous theoretical, clinical, and institutional focus has been Holocaust survivors. There has yet to appear a sustained psychoanalytic literature addressed either to or about the racial others whom we have mapped out beyond the reach of our clinical, theoretical, and programmatic margins. To the extent that we are operating parochially, we focus on people who can be constructed as seeming like ourselves—insiders, people with whom we feel we can stably identify.

Identities, like identifications, tend to feel grounded in natural processes, more like the consequence of bodily essences—of “blood”—than like the outcome of conflicted desires. *I* and *we* have an apparently self-evident foundation. This received, self-evident dimension of identity is the hallmark of parochialism. Parochialism can be thought of as the result of a restricted, inhibited range of identifications that, in turn, feels natural and warranted. Parochialism refers to conscious dimensions of identity. In clinical work, we assume a posture congruent with a parochial one. Psychoanalysts identify with their patients. We see the narrative through their eyes. We work in a first-person plural posture, forming a benign parochial group of two. Parochialism runs amok not via the restrictions stemming from its explicit set of formative identifications, but via the potential for violence stemming from its implicit set of retaliatory disidentifications.

While it may now be virtually impossible for contemporary white analysts like me to avoid confronting both our own and our discipline’s histories of misogyny and homophobia, it remains remarkably easy to pay no serious, sustained attention to our parallel histories regarding race and racism. Both formally and informally, we now think and talk seriously, even urgently, about the conceptually unstable sexual foundations from which emanate our no-longer-primary dichotomies of masculine/feminine, gay/straight, lesbian/heterosexual. We tend to think out the consequences for ourselves and for our practices of whether we are

straight/gay, man/woman, homophobic or not, misogynist or not. Even the problems presented by transsexuality have gained some respectful attention in our informal dialogues and in our clinical-theoretical literature. These changes in how we think, talk, and write about our excitements, our fears, and our identifications regarding sexually grounded matters—bodily matters—have been driven by forces originating both inside and outside the consulting room. The same cannot yet be said about race and racism.

Parochial disidentifications are not entirely private matters. Parochialisms place us within groups. These groups, in turn, affirm our place, our lineage, the available repertoire by which we make sense and order out of experience, including experience of the most private sort. Parochialisms promise to limit the set of urgent problems we have to deal with. We disidentify with them and theirs, identifying with us and ours. In this sense, parochial constriction differs from psychopathological constriction. Unlike parochialisms, psychopathological constrictions do not have as a primary determinant an affirmation of public identity, of belonging. Parochialisms, then, extending beyond the field defined by psychic reality, cannot be confidently addressed with psychoanalytic methods alone.

## THE BRACKETING FUNCTION OF THEORY

Clinical theory brackets and defines psychoanalytic fields of work. This bracketing is a necessity. To effectively work on psychic reality, analysts must, per force, exclude other “realities.” To speak of, and to work with, psychic structure is to necessarily speak of and work with aspects of mind whose forms evade historical and contemporary vicissitudes. From this point of conceptual refuge, analytic theory has developed enormous interpretive power. Protected from history, analytic theory has found myriad ways of reading history. These readings are grounded in a vocabulary of steady and timelessly present signifiers: sexuality, aggression, conflict, compromise, wish, and so on. In order to maintain theoretic-

cal and disciplinary consistency and coherence, we aim to protect these signifiers—these fundamental concepts—from historical, political, and social flux.

Psychoanalytic theories, like any others, are, in this sense, conceptually conservative. In order to maintain internal coherence, theory must protect its own conceptual spine. I think, for instance, that, in principle, psychoanalytic theory must resist the premises that allow for Foucault's (1980) hyperhistorical argument that sexualities can be "invented"—that homosexuality, for notorious example, might have somehow begun at a certain moment in time. If sexualities and sexuality were, in principle, "inventible," then the psychic structure and psychic realities derived from them would, in principle, appear as both contingent and epiphenomenal. Psychoanalytic theory resists both this premise and this corollary. Although it provides the vocabulary to conceptualize an endless range of sexual variations, it offers no vocabulary at all, I think, to conceptualize sexual "invention."

This agonistic purchase on historical determinism—no matter the distortions it may yield—might be axiomatic for any effective theory of psychic determinism. That axiom would inflect all that we do. Our every working concept is, I think, infused with the latent—and oppositional—tensions that bind historical and psychic determinisms. These tensions, after all, provide force and form to the central questions that hover over most of our work: "What happened, what is happening, and what, finally, is real?"

We can sense these tensions, as well as our disciplinary tilt toward the psychic, when we reflect on the place of race in our working models. In effect, race has no place in those models. Race is too historical. It carries its historical determinants as brashly and as undeniably as sexual fantasy carries its psychic ones. As with the idea of "invented" sexualities, clinical theory has no ready capacity to house a notion so loud with historical determinants. These historical determinants do not readily dissolve in the medium of clinical analysis. I think that, in doing clinical work, many of us—invested in clinical efficiency and effectiveness—may feel an inclination to bracket race out of our

field of work, and with that, to bracket out the historical weight carried by racialized bodies. We would want to exclude from our working field those problems for which our theory seems to offer little conceptual orientation.

We all hope to optimize the possibilities for clinical analysis. In order to practice analysis, the history(ies) that we will be inclined to work with will appear to us in the form of their psychic mediations. For example, in order to focus on the transference, on the analyst as a psychically mediated object, we will bracket out representations of the analyst that constitute him/her as a historically mediated figure. We allow for the dissolution of our historical selves in a kind of psychic solvent. We do not, in principle, insist, in the face of a counter-“factual” statement, that “that is not what I meant,” or that “that is not who I am.” On the contrary, we permit, even encourage, the dissolution of the potentially public historical record of the clinical dialogue into its private, and dyadic, psychic representations. Those representations constitute the principal material with which we work.

In fact, psychoanalytic theory is explicitly designed to function as a kind of solvent in which historical determinants dissolve and psychic ones crystallize. Any of us, then, eager for workable material, might want to let the historically racialized signifiers that mark us, as well as marking the person in front of us, dissolve. We could then seek the familiar set of transhistorical psychic signifiers that will allow us to think effectively—psychoanalytically—about this and any person whom we might clinically encounter.

Like gender, racial identity puts a biological cast on subjectivity. Just as the object in front of us might be constituted, first and foremost, as a “woman,” she will also be constituted, first and foremost, as a “black” woman. Within the subject/object world defined by racial identities, “blood” trumps mind. That is, when racial identity is an operative component, the racial adjective is primary; all others follow. This is particularly true regarding sexuality. The racial other is always a sexual other. I have never heard a clinical report in which an interracial sexual relationship has not, on racial grounds, become an explicit object of inquiry.

Once we place the object in a racial category, we are also placing the object in a sexual category.

Of course, it is not psychoanalytic theory per se that insists on this; it is history that does. The racial category of the object *matters* because the racial category of the object *has mattered*. The meanings of race today are directly continuous with its meanings of yesterday. This historical continuity is, in principle, what might be meant by historical determinism. To the extent that race remains a historically “real”—that is, historically determined—category, there will exist historically “real” regulations regarding sexual congress between races. Psychic and historical determinisms converge in the construction of the racially charged sexual object. Establishment of free racial congress would mark the end of race as a historically “real” category, and only then would *race* be adequately thought of as primarily a product of psychic determinism.

I am reminded here of Freud’s “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality” (1905), particularly the section on “Deviations in Respect to Object.” One such “deviation” that Freud could theoretically have described would have been the “deviation” in respect to the object’s “race.” The sexual charge attached to the racial other reflects the other’s interdicted/exceptional status. Sexual congress with the other must be, even when nominally permitted, transgressive. Race, then, comes to us as a supplementary category of sexual object. In disidentifying with and thereby locating the racialized object, the parochial hopes to identify and locate him-/herself. In coming to map out and know the sexuality of the racial other, the parochial also aims to map out and know its own sexuality. As concave fits together with convex, and as neurotic fits together with perverse, the parochial and his/her racial other fit together in a relation of inverse complementarity.

## PLOTTING THE COORDINATES

The racial other constitutes a distinct category of object, a category whose members are felt to share crucial similarities to each



other. Membership in the category is determinative. Membership locates the object in an object world that is itself sectioned and mapped by category: men here, women there, gays here, children there, good objects here, bad ones there, and so on. To the extent that they are lived as distinct, all distinct object categories occupy locations on this map.

The object maps I have in mind function at both personal and cultural levels, consciously and unconsciously. These maps orient us as we try to work, as we try to satisfy the exigent demands of both fantasy and idea. The maps provide information: where we might find what fantasy compels us to look for. Fantasy, forged by desire and necessity, shaped by thought, drives us into the object world to do our work. The object map I have in mind points to likely locations—internal and external—where likely objects can be found to assist us in the work at hand.

Like all categories of mapped objects, the category of racial other is mapped onto vertical and horizontal axes. The vertical axis reads difference hierarchically. This hierarchy is anchored by idealized types on one end, degraded types on the other. Objects are lined up according to their distance from the idealized and the degraded. This axis imposes measurement: Just how beautiful, how kind, how just, how fitting, how maternal, how . . . is the object in question? The object map's horizontal axis measures distance. We experience closer ones as insiders, as intimate, internal, similar, and sanctioned. The more distant ones we experience as outsiders, strangers—external, dissimilar, interdicted, and so forth. One object, then, might be located at a point that marks it as both intimate and degraded; another, say, as distant and idealized.

I mean the mapping metaphor here to pertain not only to conscious experience, but also to unconscious fantasy. Consciously or unconsciously, in desiring an object, in wanting it for purposes of our own, or in forbidding ourselves from wanting it, we are also, necessarily, locating that object, mapping it both vertically and horizontally. We look for and locate our objects in

what we take to be their proper or improper places. We move toward and away from them; we seek or flee them. This movement, in order to feel coherent or purposeful, needs to be mapped.

## TWO CLINICAL EXAMPLES

*Mr. B*

Mr. B, an Asian man in his twenties, was considering proposing marriage to his girlfriend. In his first session, he described her as

. . . wonderful in every way. She loves me. I love her. We get along. We want the same things—kids, the same kind of careers. But, and this is very hard to say, I have problems with how she looks. She's about five pounds overweight. She doesn't dress exactly right. There's something wrong, and I can't stand it. I know it means something bad about me, but I really feel it's about her.

In subsequent sessions, he elaborated:

All my life, the one thing I couldn't stand was to look like an Asian geek—thick glasses and pencils in my pocket. Everything I did was to be an American, to look like one, act like one. The clothes, the cigarettes, the cars, the women. Especially the women; they had to be perfect, like in movies. That's where it started, in the movies. My parents sent me to the movies to learn what to be. They never spoke their own language at home. I couldn't stand how our refrigerator smelled. It smelled Asian. I wanted to smell American. I loved to eat fast food. My breath would smell American. My parents only wanted me to speak English. We were nothing and we were supposed to become American. I need a woman who looks like the American ones in the movies. I hate myself for this. It won't go away, though.

As Mr. B's treatment progressed, the search for the "woman who looks like the American ones in the movies" was transposed into a search to define our clinical work as an effort to "do things right."

“Okay, then, we have it now, but what do I do?” he would often ask. “How can I do something without knowing what’s going to happen? Thinking’s no good if it doesn’t tell me what to do.” Here the racially inflected object map now reveals what was an initially hidden third dimension. In addition to its object-orienting function, the map has an overall orienting function. As Mr. B says, “Thinking can drive you crazy. You can go insane if you don’t know where you’re going.” For Mr. B, anywhere on the map is, in effect, home. Mr. B seems to use the map itself as a steady, and steadying, object. Under scrutiny, its racialized surface may dissolve, but its axes remain. Race affirms the orienting power of those axes; the axes affirm the orienting power of race.

The map defines and locates all of its subjects and objects as specimens, as representative figures of their particular location. Race intensifies the meaning of location. It has the effect of thickening the local accent. Raised as a racial specimen—a boy whose parents insisted he not learn the language they spoke—Mr. B remained located as a specimen, self-identified as a specimen, and therefore seeking an object who herself must be a specimen. “My parents were what I shouldn’t be. They wanted me to be what they were not.” I once said to Mr. B that he seemed afraid that, in speaking his mind, he might lose it.

“I have this daydream,” Mr. B recounted. “I go into a public bathroom, and someone says something to me I don’t like. I go up to him and bang his head against the sink, over and over. I walk out, not knowing what’s happened to him or what’s going to happen to me . . . There’s my mind speaking. It’s no good. Tell me what to do with that.” Off the map, off the grid, violent, out of his mind—this is Mr. B’s vision of what happens when race and its supporting axes dissolve.

#### *Mr. A*

The following vignette took place shortly after a highly publicized robbery/homicide near where Mr. A lived. A group of poor, “black” youths was arrested and charged with the killing of

a “white” woman. The killing had taken place on a gentrified, upscale street. The victim had been repeatedly described and pictured in the media as well educated, particularly attractive, promising: an easily idealized image. The crime was pitched to all of us, then, as conforming in its particulars to a widely shared fantasy of racial/class crime: the “black” underclass had senselessly erupted into a homicidal outburst in a sector of the city thought safe from exactly this kind of crime.

The day before the session to be reported, Mr. A had been speaking about what he and I had come to refer to as his “coldness,” a long-standing state of remove, from which it seemed to him that no one had any rights to witness or stake claims on what he called his “inside life”:

I’ll do what I’m supposed to do, but don’t expect me to feel what you suppose I should feel. I’m responsible to you for my actions, not for my feelings. I’ll have sex with you, I’ll be a good lover, but don’t expect that while I’m doing it, I’ll be thinking only of you. My desires are mine, not yours. Your job, and my girlfriend’s, as far as that goes, is to help me do right by myself and by you. Your job is not to help me feel right. Feelings are mine. I owe nothing to anyone about what I feel.

I go along with what the philosophers say: you have to rechristen what is called evil and turn it into your greatest good. That’s what I feel about my coldness. Is it bad or is it good?

Like with the killing downtown. I was very upset watching the news about it—there were tears in my eyes. My girlfriend saw me upset, which upset me more. Makes me seem weak. Why was I so upset? I couldn’t tell her; I wouldn’t tell her. All I said to her was that the woman killed could have been her.

I would have known how to deal with those people! They wouldn’t have been able to do that to me. I’ve been in black bars. Me and my friend are the only white guys in the bar. We can hear people talking about us. There’s trouble coming, and we just turn around and look at them. The look says everything—they back off. No one’s

ever touched me and my friend. My friend's spent time in prison. No one's ever touched him. He's dead now. It's the saddest I've ever felt. That's what started my breakdown, that he died.

I told my girlfriend it's not fortuitous that now, just now, we don't have the death penalty. We should, for cases like this. In the old days, in my old neighborhood, something like that happened, we would say how we would catch and string up those niggers. We'd mean it, too. That would be authentic—that would be real! The most disgusting thing about this is how the paper chickens out from saying they were black. I'm disgusted by the gaps in the paper. The race of the killers isn't named. That doesn't make it go away. Revenge is good—it restores order. It's crucial to restore order. To name things, to name things as they are. To get things back in their proper places.

I hate when people say revenge is no solution. They're so stupid. Revenge isn't supposed to be a solution. It's passion; it's real. It's not to correct something or to be just or moral. Revenge isn't good; it's meant to be what it is. A real thing happens, and then another real thing happens in response.

That's why lynching had meaning. Most of the people lynched were guilty. They did something. Society came after them. People tore through the walls of jails, tore down the doors. They tore through walls. There's something good and right and real about that kind of passion. People are insisting on keeping things in their place.

I'm worried now. These are the kind of ideas against which I'm always checking, checking, checking. I'm always thinking: what if these ideas leak out?

Here I commented to Mr. A that it was the first time he had made any explicit connection between any of his ideas and the need to "check" them.

I think the ideas have just leaked out here. There may be consequences. I may now be kicked out, my treatment discontinued. You could hate me now. Suddenly I'm a

bad guy; you could call in the authorities. No one's supposed to think like this any more. You could try your best to block my progress.

It's not bad, what I'm saying; people do want to string them up. It just can't be said. I'm trying to say that things have to be kept real. That reality counts, that race is real, and if black people did the killing, we should say so, and if they're strung up, it's better than faking reality, putting them in jail, waiting twenty years for the death penalty. And then forgetting what really happened—what really made the crime happen. Who really did what to whom. Race is real. If you can't say what's real, you might as well be dead; saying what's real keeps you alive. Stop saying it and you're dead. Killing that girl is a crime. Stringing them up is a crime. It's not doing it that's that important; it just has to be said. Not saying what's real, making it go dead, is also a crime. Race is real, that's all.

Here, too, in its unambiguously malignant form, we can hear the power of the map. For Mr. A, race must be real because the map must be real. The map must be real because, without it, perhaps nothing is.

### CRITIQUES OF THE MAP: FREUD, ADORNO, AND BALDWIN

Freud (1927) perfectly catches the spirit of restrictive object maps when he writes, in "Future of an Illusion":

It is true that men [sic] are like this; but have you asked yourself whether they must be like this, whether their innermost nature necessitates it? Can an anthropologist give the cranial index of a people whose custom it is to deform their children's heads by bandaging them round from their earliest years? So long as a person's early years are influenced not only by a sexual inhibition of thought but also by a religious inhibition and by a loyal inhibition derived from this, we cannot tell what in fact he is like. [pp. 47-48]

Not only is Freud catching the problem straight on here, he is also demonstrating a scope and reach that might serve us still as a cosmopolitan norm for psychoanalytic thought.

Employing an entirely different rhetorical strategy from Freud's, but sharing Freud's aim to reveal the deforming power of hierarchical object maps, here is an emblematic anecdote from Theodor Adorno (1951):

In early childhood, I saw the first snow-shovellers in thin shabby clothes. Asking about them, I was told they were men without work who were given this job so that they could earn their bread. Then they get what they deserve, having to shovel snow, I cried out in rage, bursting uncontrollably into tears. [p. 190]

Adorno is here being educated as to his and others' proper places. He is being given a lesson in object mapping. The lesson is difficult. We can hear its attendant mix of compassion and rage, identification and disidentification, incomprehension and guilt. The coordinates to be learned are clear: the objects in question are to be located as both inferior and distant. In principle, then, they cannot be heard. Adorno, an eager student, aims to achieve this act of silencing. He does this by an appeal to justice. The objects and he each "get what they deserve." Justice is achieved when subjects and objects are put in their proper places.

Here is a third effort—this one by James Baldwin (1965)—at illuminating the map and some of its malignant consequences:

Now if I, as a black man, profoundly believe that I deserve my history and deserve to be treated as I am, then I must also, fatally, believe that white people deserve their history and deserve the power and the glory which their testimony and the evidence of my own senses assure me that they have. And if black people fall into this trap, the trap of believing that they deserve their fate, white people fall into the yet more stunning and intricate trap of believing that they deserve *their* fate, and their comparative safety and that black people, therefore, need only

do as white people have done to rise to where white people now are . . . . The history of white people has led them to a fearful, baffling place . . . . They do not know how this came about; they do not dare examine how this came about. On the one hand, they can scarcely dare to open a dialogue which must, if it is honest, become a personal confession—a cry for help and healing, which is, really, I think, the basis of all dialogues—and, on the other hand, the black man can scarcely dare to open a dialogue which must, if it is honest, become a personal confession which, fatally, contains an accusation. And yet, if neither of us can do this, each of us will perish in those traps in which we have been struggling for so long. [pp. 724-725]

Adorno, a white boy, hides, hoping for silence, in order to accommodate the map's violent teachings. Baldwin, a black man, cries out, hoping for dialogue, to undercut the map's power to locate.

I want to look more closely, more speculatively, at the predicament that Adorno marks out. We can easily sense the instability of the young boy's solution. The sight of the snow-shovellers marks a moment in the history of his relations to the objects around him. One dimension of his experience of that moment is that these objects impinge upon him; they exert force. His relation to these objects, his experience of that force, will continue to press upon him—press upon him, as though from the outside, but also in the way that a psychic drive presses, as though from the inside. This driveline force exerted by historical figures like the snow-shovellers warrants scrutiny.

Freud (1915) conceptualized the drive as “the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body” (p. 122). We can say something analogous about the force exerted by our ongoing relation to charged objects—the ones capable of leaving us in a rage, crying uncontrollably. That force can be conceptualized as *the demand made upon the mind for work as a consequence of its connection with others*.



I think that, just as we can actually feel our connection to our bodies as a “demand for work,” so we, like young Adorno confronting his mapping lesson, can actually feel our connection to objects as a demand for work. Whether the source is our own charged body or our own charged objects, this work is always yet to be done. We can feel the demands placed upon us by those charged figures who, when we map them, fill us with rage and make us weep uncontrollably. The emblematic snow-shovellers here impose a demand that both comes from, and drives us into, history. There they are: charged, forceful, making a historically grounded demand upon us—there, and not here—hungry, wanting, working for us in their thin, shabby clothes. What young Adorno does not notice and what we, as psychoanalysts, do notice is that, no matter what they “deserve,” we remain bound, via identification, to those snow-shovellers.

Identification, then, liquidates all the coordinates on the hierarchical object map. Identificatory justice—if one can coin such a notion—might have us all, like the young Adorno, asking ingenuously about the snow-shovellers. In asking about them, we ask about a set of unfinished relations and unfinished histories, thereby deferring our lessons in map-making. The map is constructed only after we have stopped asking about these relations and these histories.

Adorno’s snow-shovellers function as unwanted familiars, representing in their familiarity a return, a reappearance, of abandoned objects, abandoned histories—of what we might have hoped had been permanently deposited into the past. Their present-day appearance, like the present-day appearance of the racial other, disturbs our confidence that now, at last, we might be able to put the past to rest. The racial other, then, is a marker of unfinished historical business, a sign that, as Marx (1852) put it, and as Freud just as well might have: “The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living” (p. 437).

There is much about our past that remains unthought and, in that sense, evaded. The object, racial and otherwise, provides us with the chance to *think history again*. Clinical listening can be

conceptualized as a sustained effort at capitalizing on that opportunity. We are adept at what we do, with the limited range of objects with whom we practice, but we have not yet begun to realize our responsibility to the other who is marked off by race.

## ON IDENTIFICATIONS AND THE POSSIBILITIES FOR DIALOGUE

Racism maps the human species into exclusive transhistorical groups. These groups are supposed to be separated by essential differences. This division establishes a continuous hierarchy. Racism's ideal object tops the hierarchy; its degraded object anchors it. Racism's subject locates itself in the hierarchy, between and in relation to, these two poles. Racism, then, seems to found, to mediate, and to define three kinds of relations between subjects and objects: two vertical—one upward and one downward—and one horizontal.

Racism defines the relation between its subject and its degraded object as disidentificatory. The demand to disidentify from the degraded object emanates from racist thought with the force of raw principle. Equally raw and equally forceful is the demand we feel to disidentify from racism's disidentificatory strategy.

As analysts and citizens, we feel compelled to distinguish our own hierarchical logics from racism's. We renounce any participation in the malignant sports sanctioned by racism's disidentificatory hierarchy. Our ethically driven impulse to disidentify from racism's logic will directly oppose our efforts to think and work psychoanalytically on—and therefore from within—that logic.

In principle, identifications create, at least transiently, a feeling that communication has no limit, that there exists an unimpeded, open line between two parties. In the clinical setting, this feeling of limitless communication appears and vanishes beguilingly. Psychoanalytic clinicians are particularly alert to its comings and goings. We try to indirectly read the operations of wish and defense by reading, more directly, fluctuations in our sense

of openness and identificatory contact. Contact, taken to its limit, is what, for the moment, I mean by *identification*—the sense that, no matter what is about to be said, access to the object will not be lost. Without the belief in such contact, one is confirmed in the idea that there are, indeed, sectors of mind that, if spoken, will result in abandonment. And without such contact, interpretation aimed at these unspeakable sectors comes, as it were, from outside, and is therefore reduced to the status of mere commentary. Psychoanalytic work for both parties becomes a matter of fulfilling preexisting obligations. If the sentiments and fantasies associated with the logic of racism remain walled off from identificatory contact, the resulting sequence is more likely to produce rueful anecdotes than disruptive change.

Because it is so fundamentally grounded in points of identificatory contact, I consider the theory and practice of psychoanalysis to be basically incompatible with what might be called the theory and practice of racism. Internal to the structure of psychoanalytic thought is the accumulated clinical experience of patients saying “No” to both the manner and the particulars of interpretation. In clinical theory, this “No,” this elementary exercise in refusal, has a privileged status. Intended as both self-defining and limit-setting, it is the founding developmental and political unit of discourse. It points to and marks points of conflict and opposition that both dot and constitute the borders between subjects and objects. Its patterns of usage reliably map the complementary relations linking the forces of desire to the forces of regulation, power, and subjectivity. “No” is a claim of sovereignty. Interpretation challenges that claim. Since neither party in analysis accepts the other at face value for very long, much of what actually takes place can be thought of as an exchange of “No’s.” The very possibility of effective clinical work, then, will hinge on each party’s handling of this volatile exchange.

In the theory and practice of racism, the specimen object’s “No” can be dismissed immediately. Protest is read as pretext, as sham. The operations of racism include a direct reading of the specimen object. That object is thought to be legible to the clear,

learned eye. Such readings affirm the presence of fixed, natural hierarchies. The logic of racism is guided by neither idea nor perception. Knowledge of and conviction about the degraded object has come not through piecemeal construction, but through shared experiences of revelation.

## PRIMITIVITY

There is scant sign of idiosyncrasy in the degraded manifest object of racism. No matter that the determinants of this object may derive from our most private, and thus particular, experiences of desire—met and unmet—racism constructs and targets the object as a completely standardized one. The central feature of racism's standardized degraded object is its *primitivity*. By *primitive*, I mean here *dangerously, excessively appetitive*. Racism's degraded object cannot control its own appetites, and this is its essential character. As such, racism's object wants too much and wants what it cannot be allowed to have. Its appetites are uncontrolled and therefore transgressive. No matter the peculiarities marking any of the local variations in racism's degraded object; this quality of primitivity, of excessive and uncontrolled wanting, resides as an essential, invariant feature. In this, racism's degraded object resembles the objects of homophobia and misogyny (Moss 2003). Greedy, rapacious, insatiable, corrupting, and violent—the objects are all identifiable by a cluster of characteristic excessive hungers; and, as such, each of them is figured as an incarnation of primitivity. For the degraded object of racism, as for the others, this character of primitivity is an intrinsic, natural feature.

To the extent that individuals and cultures can be said to be structured and organized at all, their structure and organization aims, at its base, at the control of appetites—their own and others.' The primitivity of racism's object, then, marks a limit, serves as a sign, of the finite reach of structure and organization. Appetite eludes structure. Appetite—what Freud called *drive*—is marked by both direction and force, an object and an intensity.

Racism's object, in its primitivity, poses a two-dimensional threat to structure and organization:

- (1) the objects it targets, and
- (2) the force with which it targets them.

The primitivity of racism's object—its appetites—poses a fundamental, and peculiar, threat to individual and cultural structure and development. Primitivity—appetite itself—aims to consume. In the name of structure and organization, it therefore must be checked and combated. By definition, the appetitive threats posed by the primitive are grounded in nature, the source of appetite. Within the sphere of racism's thought, structure and organization set the only effective limit on nature's appetites to its otherwise limitless presence. Membership in the sphere governed by such thought, then, depends upon one's capacity to systematically discipline and regulate one's appetites, one's desires. Violate these disciplinary regimes and risk exile.

The incest taboo is representative here: that sexual appetite must be regulated establishes the precept that all appetites can be regulated. Racism's degraded object, then, potentially violating all such regulation, can be granted only conditional access to the culture. Because it embodies primitivity, racism's degraded object must not be allowed to integrate, to vanish, or to blend in; rather, it must be kept visible. It must be readily and effectively identifiable; its presence and movements must be detectable. Its energy can be tapped; in moments of calm, it might be put to work, rendered useful; in moments of threat, though, it must be quarantined; and in moments of emergency, it might have to be eliminated.

Racism aims to protect structure and organization from the threat posed by the primitive. The posture of protector by which it knows itself is revealed in the disease metaphors it uses to name its object, to imagine its object's modes of action, and to envision the proper means of controlling its object. Racism's object (like its kin, the objects of homophobia, misogyny, and anti-Semitism), if left unattended, will spread, infect, infest, weaken,

sap, and destroy. It is a disease, a sickness, a cancer, a malignancy, a corrosive. This passage from a recent *New York Times* article, is representative:

We, the Afrikaner people, opened up this country, developed this country, put this country in the front ranks of the world. And it is now on the rim of becoming a typical banana republic. Black Africa is wiping out everything we have brought. We would like to bring it up to a civilized level. Control the object of racism and the result is an "opening up," a "development"; set it loose, and the object of racism "wipes out everything." [Swarns 2002, p. 1]

Racism, then, like medicine and the other therapeutic disciplines to which it indirectly claims affiliation, locates its own roots in the deepest, most vital roots of the civilization from which it stems. Like those other therapeutic disciplines, racism locates its object as a pathogen, and defines its own mission as a disciplined fight against pathology.

A newspaper reported the execution of Elmo Curl, at Masta-don, Mississippi, as

. . . a most orderly affair, conducted by the bankers, lawyers, farmers, and merchants of that county. The best people of the county, as good as there are anywhere, simply met there and hanged Curl without a sign of rowdyism. There was no drinking, no shooting, no yelling, and not even any loud talking. [Allen 2000, p. 17]

The degraded object of racism is here eliminated "without any sign of rowdyism." The only sign of appetite displayed by "the best people of the county" is the appetite—regulated and sanctioned, no matter how deadly—to rid the county of an unwanted primitive.

Rationalized violence against the racist's object, like rationalized violence against the misogynist's, the homophobe's, and the anti-Semite's object, is predicated on the necessity of protecting structure and organization—the vital order of things—against fatal

infiltration. The target is not merely the perpetrator of this or that crime, and the goal is not merely the elimination of this or that group of criminals. The target is something more fundamental, closer to the source of crime itself, a transgressively criminal appetite, latent, permanent, and polymorphous—something particular that, for generations, racism has found in its object. As structure and organization seem to depend upon the mastery of nature, so the racist's object is simply a concentrated precipitate of what must be mastered, the incarnation of surplus drive and surplus nature, both marginal and deep. The very possibility of continued civilization is at stake. Racist thinking, like misogynist and homophobic thinking, is the thought of myrmidons. The primitive object in our midst signifies a breached wall, an incomplete project.

Racism knows itself as a voice of and for civilization. Racism's object, primitivity incarnate, then, is necessarily sensed as disloyal to that self-same civilization. Racism's object owes its allegiance elsewhere. Although it may reside in and submit to the demands for appetitive control, this appearance is best thought of as subterfuge. Racism's object awaits the propitious moment; in the metaphor of disease, it is opportunistic. It aims to seduce, abduct, corrupt, defile, and undo.

The degraded object of racism is self-evidently dangerous. No matter how violent the measures necessary for its control, those measures all share in the civilizing aim of enhancing structure, promoting safety, and diminishing threat. In this sense, racism, targeting primitivity, appeals to commonsensical reason. After all, commonsensical reason also targets primitivity. Like common sense, racism grounds itself in what it knows to be the self-evident principle of self-preservation. As with common sense, this principle pre-dates and supersedes the claims of any particular experience.

Without needing to appeal to experience, reason knows the threat of primitivity as a threat. Primitivity is reason's negative complement, as wet is to dry. Within the reach of racism's reason, the primary function of personal experience is neither the

discovery nor the generation of new ideas. Experience only confirms what reason already knew. For racism, as for commonsensical reason, the evidence of experience lacks the power to disturb its underlying premises. As we gather experience, reason would have us grow more tightly tethered to the self-evident principles of self-preservation. Racism would have us do the same.

## CONCLUSION

Racism, then, is a way of thinking. People use it to tap into the wisdom of the ancients. This wisdom is codified, with the code deriving from and describing a taxonomy. Racism organizes the human world into hierarchically arranged groups. Racist thought is vertical thought: upward lies safety, below is danger. And in this, too, racism resonates with common sense. "No definition of the human species . . . has ever been proposed which would not imply a latent hierarchy" (Balibar 1993, p. 197). That is, no definition of the human species can be proposed that does not locate the human in antagonistic opposition to the other-than-human, the primitive.

As the object of racism defines the frontier between the human and the primitive, so, for Freud, does the drive define the frontier between mind and body. Racism's hierarchy speaks as, and for, the human against the primitive. Consciousness's hierarchy speaks as, and for, the mind against the body.

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## DIFFERENT DIFFERENCES: REVELATION AND DISCLOSURE OF SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE PSYCHOANALYTIC SITUATION

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*The authors propose a taxonomy of social identities, suggesting that three different classifications of identities can be distinguished. These comprise those that are innate and visible, such as race or gender; those that are innate, but invisible, such as sexual orientation; and those that are acquired or achieved, such as marital status or political affiliation. The authors argue that each of these categories has different implications for the revelation or disclosure of aspects of the therapist's identity, as well as for transference-countertransference dynamics. These points are illustrated with brief clinical examples.*

### INTRODUCTION

For the first three-quarters of a century of its existence, psychoanalysis did not have to concern itself with ethnic or cultural differences. Analysts and analysands were a remarkably homogeneous group, drawn from the same sector of society—white, Western European, or European American, predominantly Jewish, middle class, professional—and cultural or ethnic differences rarely arose. Today, analysands—and more and more analysts as well—are increasingly diverse, and we are confronted with the necessity of dealing with different social identities and fantasies about these differences in the consulting room. Some identity el-

ements such as race are usually but not always obvious, whereas others, such as sexual orientation or religion, may not be apparent, yet will nonetheless impact the therapy. In this contribution, we intend to propose a taxonomy for social identity and discuss how each of these different identities affects the conduct of psychoanalytic therapy.

Psychoanalysis has only recently begun to come to terms with differences among social identities (e.g., Blumenthal, Jones, and Krupnick 1998; Holmes 1992; Jones and Korchin 1982; Tang and Gardner 1999; Thompson 1995; Yi 1998). Although there were a few pioneering contributions that looked at the impact of racial or religious differences in psychoanalytic treatment (e.g., Bernard 1953; Curry 1964; Fischer 1971), for the most part, this issue was not addressed until the social upheavals of the last quarter of the twentieth century, brought on in large measure by the various civil rights movements. As a consequence, analysts are now being confronted with the meaning of differences in race, ethnicity, religion, social class, and so on.

In addition, a focus on differences necessarily forces us to consider the meaning of similarity (Tang and Gardner 1999). As Leary (1999) pointed out, racial identity—and, we would add, other aspects of social identity as well—is performative, and a performance requires an audience. Thus, one is only black or white, Chinese or Bulgarian, gay or bisexual in reference to an other, real or fantasied. The meanings that each of these identities might have necessarily takes into account what it means not to have them. One is only “typically Chinese” or “stereotypically gay” in comparison to non-Chinese or to straight people. One’s own cultural forms are considered “normal” by most people; it is only when contrasted with the practices of other groups that the idea of other ways of being emerges. It is no accident that the word for one’s own group in many languages translates as “the people.”

We find highly useful Levenson’s (1996) distinction between *self-revelation* and *self-disclosure*, though we are using these terms in a somewhat different way. Whereas Levenson was primarily concerned with the revelation or disclosure of attitudes, reactions

to the patient, or countertransferences, we are broadening the terms to refer as well to the exposure of elements of the therapist's social identity. By *self-revelation*, we refer to those aspects of the self that are revealed passively, as it were, by the therapist. An example might be the ring that a therapist wears that reveals his or her marital status. Despite the revelation of personal information, the patient may or may not register it. One of us (Smith) had a patient of many years who maintained that she was unaware of his marital status, despite the presence of a wedding band.

These revelations may be advertent, as in the example of the ring or the choice of office décor—revealing aspects of the therapist's taste from which other inferences may be made—or they may be inadvertent. An example of the latter might be a therapist's unfamiliarity with a cultural practice that suggests that she or he is from a different group.

*Disclosures*, on the other hand, are deliberate statements intended to reveal something personal about the therapist. Telling a patient one's sexual orientation, marital status, or religion would fall into this latter category.

## A PROPOSED TAXONOMY OF ELEMENTS OF IDENTITY

We propose to categorize various social identities into three broad groupings and suggest that these groups have different implications for the processes of revelation and disclosure, as well as different implications for the transference-countertransference relationship. In our view, social identities vary in the degree to which they are visible and voluntarily adopted.

The first broad group comprises those elements that are innate and visible. Chief among these are race and gender. In most instances, our patients know our race as well as our gender. In some cases, this information may be available to them even prior to the first meeting from the therapist's name, although as noted below, names are not infallible markers. Of course, this

knowledge says little about the meaning of the assignment to a racial category and may reflect a misapprehension of the therapist's self-identification (e.g., in the case of a person of mixed race).

The second category comprises those identities that are not adopted, but may not be visible. We have in mind here cultural heritage, social class of origin, and sexual orientation.<sup>1</sup> For the most part, these are not automatically revealed to the patient simply by the therapist's appearance. Of course, some information is revealed by the therapist's name—Dr. Goldberg is likely to be Jewish and Dr. Martinelli, Italian—but often names do not coincide with ethnicity (e.g., Senator John Kerry is part Jewish; former Senator William Cohen is not). Similarly, while manner of dress or certain gestures may provide data for speculation, for the most part, a therapist's sexual orientation is not generally obvious unless she or he chooses to make it known.

Finally, there are those identities that are chosen by the therapist, such as current religion, political affiliation, marital and parental status, and so forth; those that are achieved, such as socioeconomic status; or those that may befall one, such as having a disability.<sup>2</sup> For the most part, these identity elements are not visible—unless the therapist chooses to make them such—for example, by wearing a ring or displaying a religious symbol—and the therapist must choose whether or not to disclose this kind of information.

Of course, these are not clear, non-overlapping groups. Race may be invisible, as in those instances in which a mixed-race individual's ethnicity cannot be readily discerned. Similarly, as mentioned above, there are aspects of nonracial identity that may be readily apparent from a therapist's appearance or name. Some

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<sup>1</sup> We recognize that the genetic basis of sexual orientation is not a settled question. We do not mean to take a position on this issue, only to suggest that, for the majority of individuals, sexual orientation is felt to be an immutable aspect of the individual's own core identity.

<sup>2</sup> Although we recognize that disabilities can often be an important aspect of social identity for both patients and therapists, issues of disability will not be discussed in this paper. The complexity of these issues places them beyond the scope of this paper.

elements that we might normally think of as invisible (e.g., region of origin) may be revealed by the therapist's mode of speech or expression. Nevertheless, we believe that this taxonomy is useful for the purpose of thinking about the sharing of personal information in the psychoanalytic situation.

*Identity Revealed: The Innate and Visible*

The innate and visible aspects of social identity, i.e., race and gender, are revealed to the analysand regardless of the analyst's wishes. The role of gender in psychoanalysis has long been a topic of discussion (e.g., Bonaparte 1933; Deutsch 1944). We intend to focus here on race and the effect of its revelation on the psychoanalytic situation.

Race is a more recently "discovered" issue among psychoanalysts (Holmes 1992; Leary 1995; Tang and Gardner 1999; Thompson 1995; Yi 1998). In large measure, this reflects the fact that race is difficult to talk about. Official rhetoric notwithstanding, ours is a highly racialized society (Leary 1997); yet, at the same time, the conversation about race is beset with confusion and contradiction.

To begin with, there is no agreement as to what constitutes *race*. It is accepted by most anthropologists that, biologically, there is no such thing as race (Cavilli-Sforza 2000; Templeton 1998).<sup>3</sup> Rather, it is a social construct used to describe individuals who share certain physical similarities and geographical origins of ancestry. Despite this fact, we have tended to reify racial differences and to assume that these are meaningful categories—and even that "race trumps all." By this latter phrase, we mean that there is a presumption in our society that racial dif-

<sup>3</sup> Although recent research on biological differences among so-called races may seem to cast doubt on this statement, the fact that certain populations differ in particular markers does not substantiate that they constitute a biologically meaningful category. Certain traits cluster within certain geographically determined population groups. The decision to assign particular weight to some—e.g., skin color, eye shape—and identify them as markers of a subspecies—i.e., a race—is a social and political one. (See Cooper 2005; Ossorio and Duster 2005; Shields et al. 2005.)

ferences are paramount; that, for example, an African American lawyer from Los Angeles has more in common with a black sharecropper from Arkansas than she does with a white, urban lawyer. Despite the growing evidence that race is not a valid biological category, there continues to be an effort to reify “racial differences” (Rushton and Jensen 2005).

For generations, it was accepted that there were three races—formerly Negroid, Mongoloid, and Caucasian, now black, white, and Asian—but, recently, a fourth “race,” Hispanic, has been added, at least in the United States. The confusion over race is evident in the terms we use. The first two of these terms (black and white) refer—loosely—to skin color, the third (Asian) is geographical, while the fourth (Hispanic) has referents to language and culture.

Nor is it necessarily even clear who belongs to which category. Recently, the press described Essie-Mae Washington-Williams as the “biracial daughter” of the late Strom Thurmond, while on the same day, Illinois Senator Barak Obama, the son of a Kenyan father and a white Kansan mother, was characterized as “black.” It is interesting to consider who gets to make these determinations. In the two instances cited above, it was the press that “decided” that one individual was black, and the other biracial, irrespective of their own self-identification. Similarly, golfer Tiger Woods, whose parentage is a mixture of African American, European American, and Thai, was referred to as “black” by the press, until he insisted that his mixed-race background be respected.

There are significant consequences for the psychoanalytic situation of this tendency to reify racial differences and within-race similarities. The racial similarity or difference between patient and therapist is an important fact in the treatment, whether or not it is addressed directly. We are in agreement with Leary (2000), who posited the concept of *racial enactment* to characterize those interactions in which societal fantasies and assumptions about race are replayed in the therapeutic encounter. Consider the following vignette.

The therapist is a blonde, blue-eyed woman from the American South, with a pronounced accent. The patient is a young, Hispanic single mother from a working-class background who was the first in her extended family to attend university. The patient and therapist are contemplating termination, brought about by the end of the school year, when the patient begins a session by discussing her upcoming trip to Barcelona for an intensive language program.

As she addresses her anxiety about the trip, the therapist comments that her familiarity with the language might be some comfort. The patient replies that she is afraid of being discriminated against. "The Spanish are biased against dark-skinned people, you know," she asserts. "Their ideal is blond hair and blue eyes. Northerners there also look down upon those from the *south*."

The therapist wonders aloud if the patient isn't referring to their own relationship. Mightn't the patient be feeling that she (the therapist) is looking down upon her?

The patient replies that she did feel in the previous session that the therapist was contemptuous when she inquired about contraception in response to the patient's talking about having sex with her on-again, off-again boyfriend. "I felt like you thought I was just another one of those irresponsible Mexicans who're getting pregnant all the time," she says.

This is a typical racial enactment. As a white American Southerner, the therapist is the physical embodiment of the stereotypical bigot, regardless of her actual attitudes toward minorities. She could not help but say something that would be construed as condescending or worse, just as the patient could not help experiencing it as such. Indeed, the comment about northern Spaniards looking down upon southerners may have been for the patient a form of turning passive into active, pointing out to the therapist that she, too, is subject to discrimination as a Southerner living in California.

Of course, many themes are condensed in an interaction such as this. The patient is dealing with separation—from home as well



as from the therapist. She is also dealing with her guilt over surpassing her family, as well as her ambivalence over her role as a mother. Echoes of these can be heard in the material, but the point we wish to stress is that all of the themes mentioned are played out in racial or cultural space, that area of immutable difference between patient and therapist that must be negotiated if the two are to find each other.

Dealing with differences has become an increasingly important aspect of working in the current society. Historically, the idea of difference has been an underlying factor in enmity between groups. When these differences are taken to the extreme of what Erikson (1968) called *pseudospeciation*, communication is all but impossible, and the chasm between groups of people is impossibly wide. It is also important to stress that specific fantasies about "racial" groups—irresponsible Mexicans, in the above example— influence relationships, regardless of whether or not they are consciously held by the particular participants. Whether or not a therapist believes that African Americans have rhythm or are less intelligent, or that Chinese have close-knit families and are good at math, these stereotypes are out there and must be recognized when they are enacted in the transference.

In our experience, the fact of the therapist's racial identity serves as a powerful projective screen. It is often used in very concrete ways to encompass other, less visible identities. At times, racial similarity can be exaggerated and differences in culture denied in the interest of building a therapeutic relationship. For example, a family, whom we will call the "L's," was referred to one of us (Tang) following the tragic death of a child. The family was from Laos. They would only agree to see someone who was Asian, and there were no Laotian therapists in the area. Whereas in Asia, the cultural differences between a Chinese and a Laotian would be vast, as members of the same "race" in the United States, the similarities are enhanced. The therapist was uncomfortable with how little she in fact knew of the Khmer subculture of the L family, but felt it would be destructive of the fragile working alliance to make an issue of the differences between her and the family. This seemed to be confirmed when the father stated, "At least

you understand Asian families.” In this case, then, there was a need to deny the reality of being from dissimilar cultures in the early stage of the therapy in order to permit the development of a therapeutic space.

Tang was also consulted by a young woman from Central America, Ms. E, who had grown up in poverty and violence in a drug-ridden area of Southern California. She made it clear from the start that she would never consider seeing anyone white. She felt unseen and demeaned by the whites for whom she worked. Again in this case, the patient made assumptions about the therapist’s knowing what it was like not only to be a member of a minority, but also to be poor and demeaned; these were the invisible traits that she attributed to her therapist because of the therapist’s race.

When elements of identity are obvious and therefore revealed, patients can make a conscious choice as to whether race and gender are important factors in selection of a therapist. The therapist is not called upon to decide about self-disclosure. However, there are certain invisible elements that a patient might insist on knowing and that might be prerequisites for the patient. For example, a patient may insist on seeing a therapist who is a parent, or who is Jewish. Such insistence forces the issue of whether or not to disclose from the outset of treatment.

### *Silent Identities: Innate But Invisible*

Those identities that are innate but invisible offer some of the thorniest dilemmas for the clinician. One’s sexual orientation or ethnic identity may be a central part of one’s sense of self, but because these are generally not visible, the therapist is faced with the choice to reveal them or not. As with racial identities, the kind of categories that we are placing under this rubric also accrue stereotypes and fantasies that are impossible to avoid: gay men have good taste in clothing, Italians are overly emotional, upper-class American Easterners eschew physical signs of affection. The difference here, of course, is that these aspects of the therapist’s identity may or may not be known or knowable.

It should also be stressed that, because of the invisible nature of these elements, there is considerable room for misapprehension or misidentification. Thus, a German-Jewish therapist who marries an Italian and takes his last name for hers is apt to be seen as Italian by her patients, unless she chooses to disclose her actual ethnicity. Similarly, a gay man who wears a ring similar to a wedding band may be assumed to be straight by his patients.

The possibility for misapprehension can lead to significant issues in the transference relationship. A patient who reveals markedly homophobic attitudes in therapy under the misperception that his male therapist is straight creates a countertransference dilemma for the therapist. For this therapist to reveal his sexual orientation may be difficult if not impossible after such a revelation by the patient; at the least, it is likely to short-circuit any further discussion of these attitudes. At the same time, however, to not disclose—Leary (1999) would consider this an instance of *passing*—leaves the therapist in the position of living a lie, and perhaps of experiencing a personal attack that cannot be discussed.

As with those identity elements in the first rubric, these are aspects of a person's sense of self that lie at the core of who she or he is as a social being. Unlike the first group, however, they are generally not visible to the outside world unless there is an unambiguous marker, such as an ethnic name. Whereas an African American therapist generally need not wonder if her patient knows that she is black, a lesbian therapist must confront the question of whether or not to disclose this information.

### *The Chosen: Voluntarily Adopted or Achieved Identities*

The final category that we will discuss consists of those identity elements that are achieved or adopted more or less voluntarily. For the most part, these are also aspects of social identity that may be less permanent. In this category, we include such aspects of one's personhood as marital status, parental status, political affiliation, and current religion. As with those elements in the second

category, these are usually invisible and not generally revealed, unless, of course, the therapist chooses to do so.

It might seem, therefore, that there is nothing to be gained by separating these into a different category. We believe, however, that there is a fundamental difference between aspects of identity in this category and the previously described ones. Because they tend to be innate and relatively immutable, those identity elements in the second category described are generally seen as part of an individual's core identity, whereas the elements in this last category may be less permanent and not as central to a person's sense of who she or he is.

We recognize that this statement may be somewhat controversial; some individuals might argue that becoming a husband or wife, or experiencing a religious conversion, for example, changes the sense of self in profound ways. While we do not dispute this, we believe that there is an irreducible difference between those identity elements that are inborn or laid down in the first few years of life, and those that are acquired much later.

Researchers agree, for example, that gender identity is generally fixed by the end of the first few years of life and rarely changes (Fast 1999; Stoller 1972). Even those who advocate a more fluid concept of gender identity (e.g., Sweetnam 1996) acknowledge this. Similarly, race or ethnicity becomes important to one's sense of self early in life (Thompson 1995). Neither of these is apt to change over the course of the life span. In essence, we conceive of core identity as the cards that one is dealt at birth and over which one has little or no control. These are also aspects of one's identity that tend to be rooted in the experience of the body, which is, of course, the crux of ego development (Freud 1923). For most, sexual orientation falls into the same rubric, although there are some—primarily women—for whom this may be a more fluid identity.

Thus, we conceive of the elements in this third category as choices that are made or consequences of such choices. Although they may be extremely important aspects of one's identity, they are neither part of one's basic personality, nor are they likely to

be immutable. While getting married or divorced changes many things about how one lives one's life or relates to others, it rarely alters one's fundamental identity.

Because these are attained or adopted identity elements and not, therefore, usually part of the core sense of self, it is less likely that the therapist will disclose them in the course of therapy. While there is considerable debate about whether or not a therapist should reveal her or his sexual orientation to a patient who requests this information, few would suggest that disclosing one's political party or how many children one has is a part of standard technique.

From the point of view of the therapist, a patient's projections about identity elements in the third category—for example, whether or not one is married, or is a parent—are usually seen as opportunities for exploration; however, when projections are made about the therapist's identity in the second category—e.g., sexual orientation—there is a greater likelihood that the therapist will feel misunderstood in a fundamental way, and thus a greater pressure to disclose in order to rectify the misperception.

For example, one of us (Smith) had a patient who began a session with a diatribe about the selfishness of drivers of a particular make of car. It so happened that it was the same make of car that the therapist drove, but he was uncertain whether or not the patient was aware of this. Had he known, of course, the comments would have been obvious transference statements, but for him to interpret this without knowing would have meant risking a narcissistic injury to the patient. The important point here is that, although some people identify strongly with their automobiles, being a "such-and-such" driver is rarely central to one's core identity, and the only real risk of the therapist's not addressing this was an opportunity lost. It would have been quite different had the patient gone on about "filthy faggots" to a gay therapist or "bloodsucking Jews" to a Jewish one, and the therapist's countertransference reaction would likely have been much more intense.

## SIMILARITY, DIFFERENCE, AND THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

The fundamental issue involved in these various aspects of social identity, of course, is that of difference and its corollary, similarity. The degree of perceived similarity between patient and therapist is frequently an important dimension in the development and maintenance of a therapeutic relationship. We know, for example, that many patients choose their therapists on the basis of perceived similarity—ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and so on—with the belief that they will be better understood by someone of a similar background. Because patients usually do not know much about the therapist's background, these outward manifestations of social identity serve as important signifiers.<sup>4</sup>

The therapeutic relationship implies a sense of *we-ness*. This *we-ness* is not necessarily an undifferentiated derivative of the early mother-child dyad (Winnicott 1971), but rather a more mature sense of connectedness with the other. It is axiomatic that in order for there to be a *we*, there needs to be a *they*. Similarity, in other words, is inherently a comparative term. Freud (1930) understood this when he referred to the “narcissism of minor differences” (p. 114) in order to explain enmity between groups that are so similar—Portuguese and Spanish, northern and southern Germans, and so on.<sup>5</sup> The same holds true of the therapeutic relationship: patient and therapist are not so much *similar* as they are *more similar* than either of them is to someone else.

This was clearly illustrated in the two cases described earlier, those of the L family and Ms. E. In both cases, the patients felt alienated and marginalized in the larger society, and needed to

<sup>4</sup> The need to perceive this kind of similarity can often lead patients to imagine connections. One of us (Smith) had a patient, a survivor of severe child abuse, who was convinced that the therapist, too, had had a traumatic childhood, because she could “see” remnants of pain in his eyes.

<sup>5</sup> A humorous example: one of the most popular T-shirts in New Zealand reads, “I only root for two teams: New Zealand and anyone who is playing against Australia.”

feel a connection with the therapist that was based on a perceived shared minority status. Ms. E assumed that, because the therapist was also a minority member, she necessarily shared other aspects of her own experiences with poverty and discrimination.

At the same time, however, it would be an error to assume that patients unambivalently seek therapists whom they see as similar to themselves. For some, similarity threatens the sense of self. Perceived differences then become a reassurance that the patient-therapist boundary is secure.

In short, we can conceive of a continuum of similarity/difference in social identity; and patients will locate themselves along that continuum in terms of how they wish to experience the relationship—on the basis of the need for a connection with the therapist, on the one hand, and for a secure boundary, on the other. It is our experience that, while in the initial phase of therapy, the patient often clings tenaciously to a particular view of the degree of similarity between self and therapist, as treatment progresses, the patient is more able to accept realistic views of the therapist's identity and to tolerate a greater degree of either difference or similarity.

## REVELATION, DISCLOSURE, AND THE NEED TO BE KNOWN

Until recently, it was considered axiomatic that therapists must remain relatively anonymous in order for psychoanalytic psychotherapy to proceed. Confronting the patient with the reality of the therapist's self forecloses the possibilities for fantasy and, therefore, vitiates the transference. The lack of direct knowledge about the therapist fosters the development of illusions, which, according to Khan (1971), are necessary for the use of language in therapy to lead to insight. Essentially, what is not known leads to fantasy, conjecture, and the development of a shared reality; what is known can no longer be an object of interest.

More recently, however, a growing minority of analysts has questioned this belief. Renik (1995, 1998, 1999), in particular, has

been outspoken in stating that self-disclosure on the part of the analyst furthers rather than hinders the development of the transference and, ultimately, of the analytic work. Renik, however, is concerned primarily with the disclosure of the analyst's thoughts and reactions during the analysis, rather than details of her/his personal life. While Renik has suggested that the patient's knowledge of some details of the analyst's personal life does not interfere with the development of the transference, he does not advocate the disclosure of such information.

Our clinical experience has demonstrated that many patients require a certain degree of knowledge about their therapists in order to feel secure that their communications will be understood. Whereas the transference may require relative anonymity in order to develop, the therapeutic alliance, as we discussed above, calls for a degree of similarity, and similarity necessarily requires knowledge. How to deal with these competing requirements is one of the most difficult technical questions in psychoanalytic therapy.

As modern intersubjective theorists have noted, the myth of the anonymous analyst is just that—a myth (Hoffman 1992; Mitchell 1988; Smith 1990; Stolorow, Atwood, and Brandchaft 1987; Strenger 1991). Numerous aspects of the therapist's social identity are inevitably revealed to the patient in ways we have mentioned above. In particular, those aspects that fall into the first category, innate and visible, are generally known to the patient; these are areas in which the therapist cannot be anonymous.

The more difficult problem lies in the area of the remaining two categories of social identity, those that are not readily apparent to the patient. Levenson (1996), in agreement with most modern theorists, and in contrast to Renik (1999), cautions against self-disclosure: "I am much more wary about self-disclosure . . . . Self-disclosure often seems to be a reparative effort by the analyst after some acting-in on his or her part" (p. 247). Renik (1999), on the other hand, argues that full disclosure (other than details about the analyst's personal life) should be the default position of the analyst, and information be withheld only for good clinical reasons.



In principle, we agree with Levenson with regard to information about the therapist's identity. According to classical tenets, insofar as it is possible to achieve, the fewer details about the therapist that the patient knows, the greater the latitude for fantasy. One of the problems with the disclosure of personal data is the fact that these tend to be enduring aspects of the therapist's social self; once they are known, they can never be unknown. This is in contrast with the disclosure of one's thoughts or feelings, which are transitory and situation specific.

It is also true that patients often do not want to know these personal details. For example, one of us (Smith) recalls a patient who would always ask where he was going on vacation. He would never answer this question, in part because this particular patient was given to envy and would likely have compared her experience unfavorably with his. Finally, at one point, he replied to the inevitable question by asking, "Do you really want to know?" "No, I don't," she answered unhesitatingly. Her request had actually been a plea for him to remain consistent in his therapeutic stance, and not to give in to her self-denigrating curiosity.

At the same time, judicious disclosure of personal details may foster the alliance at critical junctures and deepen the therapeutic discourse (Leary 1997). This is especially true where issues such as ethnicity, social class, or sexual orientation are concerned. It is important to note that most of these identities involve differentials in power, and in some instances, patients are reluctant to be open while feeling themselves to be in a "one-down" position. One gay therapist of our acquaintance subtly let his new patients know of his orientation by telling them that his office was "a block north of the X [a popular gay bar]." Gay patients could read into this the fact that he was gay, whereas straight patients might simply hear it as a set of directions. We suggest that such disclosures be limited to those instances in which they appear to enhance the revelation of critical material, and do not appear (insofar as can be determined) to compromise formation of the transference.

One of us (Smith, who is white), in treating a Chinese-born woman, chose to disclose his familiarity with her hometown at what appeared to be a critical juncture of the therapy:

The patient, Ms. H, a middle-aged woman who was deeply depressed, had had a traumatic childhood blighted by a disfiguring birth defect that wasn't repaired until her mid-teens. In addition, her father had died when she was two and she was shunted off to various relatives, never knowing how long she would be living in a particular house.

Throughout the treatment, Ms. H had been reluctant to discuss any of the details of her childhood, insisting that "the past is the past." The therapist, however, sensed that a major component of this reluctance was the fear that she wouldn't be understood. As she was describing a recent trip to Hong Kong, during which she had visited the neighborhood in which her family home had been located, the therapist asked her what the name of the street was. When she told him, he then said, "Oh, that's East Tsim Sha Tsui—the neighborhood must be quite different now!" The patient immediately brightened and exclaimed, "Oh! You know Hong Kong," and proceeded to begin a lengthy description of the neighborhood and her memories of growing up.

It is our belief that the patient's sense that the therapist was familiar with some aspect of her own experience led her to be able to trust that he could understand the more painful aspects of it as well. The therapist's decision to disclose his familiarity with her home city was based on a sense that the therapy had repeatedly gotten stuck whenever Ms. H came close to discussing her childhood.

Interestingly, the patient never expressed any curiosity about how the therapist came to have this kind of knowledge, nor did she question the depth or accuracy of his cultural knowledge. It is our supposition that she did not want to know more about the therapist's personal life; rather, she was satisfied with the fact that he appeared to have some knowledge of her cultural background.

This case also illustrates how individual psychodynamics and cultural identity may not be easily disentangled. Ms. H had always felt like an outsider, invisible and misunderstood. The therapist's indication that he was familiar with aspects of her background was experienced by her as an instance of being seen. This kind of disclosure risks opening a Pandora's box of complications, however; one can easily imagine the patient asking a host of questions about the therapist's familiarity with Hong Kong that could then lead to many more disclosures that might not be therapeutically useful. One point we wish to stress is that the therapist's decision is not merely to disclose or not to disclose, but also how much to do so.

In this case, the disclosure of cultural familiarity also enabled the therapist to intervene in a particular way that he might not otherwise have been able to do, as evidenced in a subsequent session:

Ms. H was discussing her mother's lack of attention to her and her family. Her mother would reject invitations to family gatherings or insist on bringing along strangers from her church. She missed her grandson's (Ms. H's son) high school graduation because it fell on a day that was inconvenient. Ms. H expressed her disappointment, but rather than displaying any anger at her mother, she wondered what it was about herself that made her mother reject her.

In response to a particular instance of her mother's failure to attend a family gathering, the therapist commented about the mother's behavior by saying, "That certainly isn't very Chinese of her." Ms. H was brought up short, reflected a moment, and then replied, "No, it isn't; you know, my relatives have said that my mother is really strange. One time when she was in Shanghai . . .," and she began to talk about her mother in a totally different light.

We wish to make two points about this second vignette. In the first place, by characterizing the mother's behavior as "not very Chinese," instead of self-centered or narcissistic, the therapist was

able to utilize a cultural idiom to bypass Ms. H's tendency to defend her mother against criticism. Second, it was the therapist's prior disclosure of his familiarity with Chinese culture that gave him the legitimacy to make such a comment and to have it accepted. We conceptualize this as a cultural analogue to Renik's (1995) argument that the analyst's self-disclosure serves to make her or his thought processes transparent and helps patients recognize the rationale for interpretations.

Yet another problem emerges when we consider *inadvertent* revelations. Often, therapists unintentionally reveal aspects of their social identity that can profoundly affect the treatment. A patient may, for example, see the therapist driving and observe a child's car seat in the car, thus revealing that she is a parent. In the following example, the therapist inadvertently revealed her ethnicity, although not to have done so would have meant misleading the patient.

The therapist had been seeing a Jewish woman intensively for some years when the patient told a story during which she used a relatively obscure Yiddish expression. When the therapist failed to inquire about its meaning, the patient stopped suddenly and exclaimed, "You knew what that meant . . . why . . . you're Jewish!"

At this point, patient and therapist were confronted with this revelation and needed to explore what the therapist's Jewishness meant to the patient. Equating knowledge of Yiddish with Jewish identity (and, by implication, a lack of such knowledge with being a gentile), the patient was giving voice to a particular conception of Jewishness, i.e., that of a cultural heritage. Had she conceived of it solely as a religion, her reaction to this revelation might have been quite different.

But there was also a need to explore the meaning of the therapist's not having previously disclosed that information, as well as of the patient's not having asked. In this case, the fact that patient and therapist were in fact from the same cultural background had remained out of awareness until such time as the patient was ready to know it. Perhaps this speaks to the patient's need to pre-

serve an area of difference prior to this stage in the treatment. As Leary (1999) noted, passing (pretending to be of a different race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and so forth) is a performance that requires the audience not to ask certain questions.

Furthermore, one can see immediately that, had this therapist asked about the meaning of the Yiddish word, she would have been misleading the patient, implying that she was ignorant of something when she was not. A fruitful approach to this clinical problem would include examining why this particular revelation was demanded at this time. It is likely, for example, that the patient was ready to know something about the therapist, and that she unconsciously chose the term as a test.

Dealing with similarities and differences in social identity creates specific countertransference tensions for therapists. We wish to highlight three particular sources of tension that may lead to countertransference reactions. We believe that therapists, like their patients, have a need to be known. Therapists have to learn to abstain from gratifying this need and to refrain from disclosing aspects of themselves in the interests of maintaining room for the patient's fantasies. Where therapists feel misperceived or misunderstood in an element of core identity—visible or not—the need to be known is likely to be considerably stronger and may stimulate powerful countertransference reactions. As mentioned earlier, it is much more difficult for a lesbian therapist to sit silently through a homophobic diatribe from a patient who does not know that she is gay, than for a therapist who is a mother to sit through the accusation that she could not possibly understand children.

In many cases, patients may be convinced that the therapist has had similar experiences to their own, such as discrimination or poverty—a conviction that grows out of fantasies about similarities in cultural or socioeconomic background. When these convictions are untrue, the therapist faces a dilemma: on the one hand, wanting to maintain the patient's illusion in the service of the therapeutic alliance, while on the other, feeling dishonest and somewhat fraudulent. For example:

A Chinese-American patient who chose to see a Chinese American therapist in part because of her ethnicity discussed in some detail a Chinese New Year gathering and all the rituals associated with it, assuming that the therapist was familiar with them. However, the therapist, who was highly acculturated, was, in fact, ignorant of these cultural expressions. The therapist could either pretend that this was something with which she was familiar, or risk a rupture in the alliance at a particularly inappropriate time. This experience left the therapist feeling vaguely dishonest, as though she were misrepresenting herself.

In the example of Ms. E, cited earlier, the patient was convinced that the therapist, Tang, had a similarly disadvantaged background. Tang felt somewhat fraudulent by not correcting this misperception. At the same time, she recognized that this was an important part of Ms. E's felt connection with her.

We believe that there is a difference between this situation and a patient's musings about whether or not her therapist is married, has children, or belongs to some religious group, all of which can be explored for their transference meanings. But with Ms. E, it was the unexamined and seemingly firm belief that the therapist has indeed had similar experiences of poverty that left the therapist in a dilemma. It felt uncomfortable and dishonest to allow this fantasy to continue; yet it appeared to be important to maintain it as a precondition to the therapeutic alliance. As the relationship deepened, however, Ms. E seemed ready to acknowledge the difference in social class, as seen in the following vignette:

Ms. E had been speaking about her relationships with men and her conflict around her identity as a sexual being. Tang made an interpretation with which Ms. E was clearly delighted, and she exclaimed, "Man, you're good. You should flick your collar!"

In response to Tang's look of puzzlement, Ms. E explained that, in the inner-city neighborhood where she had grown up, flicking one's collar was a way of indicating an achievement. This was totally foreign to Tang, who became painfully aware of the yawning chasm that

separated her experience from that of her patient. Tang did not comply, even when Ms. E insisted and even demonstrated how it should be done.

In the following session, Ms. E said that she had felt “stupid” asking her therapist to do something that was part of the “hood.” Tang responded that she had felt uncomfortable in having to acknowledge that they were, in fact, different in that respect. Ms. E then spoke poignantly about differences between herself and Asian friends of hers, friends who had grown up in nice neighborhoods in intact families. Therapist and patient were faced with the awareness that, indeed, there were vast differences between them in the invisible but powerful area of social class. The therapist’s subjective experience in this example was of having been unmasked: that in fact she and the patient *were* from different worlds. She felt like an impostor.

In this case, the difference in race, which was visible, and the difference in social class, which was not, had to be denied in the creation of the therapeutic alliance. Thus, the patient saw the therapist as similar by virtue of the fact that both were nonwhite, and the social-class issue had been left unexamined. As the therapy progressed and Ms. E felt increasingly close to her therapist, the reality of these differences could be tolerated.

This stands in contrast to the earlier example of the Jewish patient who “discovered” that her therapist was also Jewish. Thus, in one case, differences needed to be denied until it was safe to acknowledge them, whereas in another, it was the similarity that was initially kept out of awareness.

The therapeutic dyad is one in which the therapist is typically perceived to have more power than the patient. When patient and therapist are of different races, ethnic groups, sexual orientations, or gender, there is an even greater perceived power differential when the therapist is from the majority, either ethnically or in sexual orientation. When a white therapist treats a minority patient, a number of issues can be raised in the countertransference.

In a pair of stimulating papers, Straker (2004) and Suchet (2004) make the important point that members of the majority

culture are beneficiaries of structural racism, regardless of their own attitudes. Straker, a self-described progressive South African, notes feelings of “shame and guilt arising from involuntary forced association with the corrupt apartheid regime” (p. 407); while Suchet, also South African, argues—somewhat differently—that the shame and guilt at being white is typically dissociated, and that a reidentification with the aggressor is necessary if white therapists are to work with minority patients.

Altman (2000), for example, describes his reaction to an African American patient who not only missed appointments, but also failed to pay him:

I also got caught in the tangled web of guilt, anger, and greed. A complementary anti-Jewish stereotype was activated as well. I began to feel like the stereotypical greedy Jew, like the Jewish landlord feeding off the poverty-stricken residents of the ghetto. [p. 594]

In reaction to his guilt and shame, Altman failed to confront the patient about the missed payments for several months. It is interesting to note that here, too, there is a collapse of race and social class, as if, as an African American, Altman’s patient must also be of lower socioeconomic status, although in fact he was a successful professional.

We would also like to add that similar dynamics—albeit less easily recognized—occur in the case of invisible differences. Straight therapists, for example, benefit from a society that discriminates against gays and lesbians in a myriad of ways, including by specifically prohibiting gay and lesbian couples from enjoying the benefits of legal marriage. But because these differences are not visible, therapists and patients may be less apt to explore the attendant power issues than in the case of racial differences.

It must also be kept in mind, as Tang and Gardner (1999) have pointed out, that these issues operate quite differently in cases where the therapist is a member of a minority. Making note of racial differences is often more easily accomplished by minority therapists, who do not bear the burden of white guilt. In addi-



tion, minorities have to deal with issues of race on a daily basis and are more attuned to subtle references to race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. In our experience, it is rare for a white patient to raise the issue of race directly, though it is frequently manifested in disguised form, such as in dreams, slips, and the like. As a minority therapist, one is perceived both as occupying a position of power, and as the object of disadvantage. In the same way that white therapists may alter their technique when feelings of guilt and shame arise in work with a minority patient, white patients may also feel inhibited about confronting their minority therapists because they worry about hurting the therapist, who may have already suffered as a result of her minority status, and they fear being seen as racist.

## CONCLUSION

As our society becomes more diverse, analysts and therapists must confront issues that were barely known a generation ago. Chief among these are the dilemmas raised by racial, cultural, and class differences between therapist and patient. In the classical psychoanalytic training of the past, therapists were taught that the identity of the analyst was to remain unknown so as to serve as a projective screen. As increasing numbers of minority individuals have become analysts and therapists, the issue of *race* has become an important dimension to deal with. Much of what has been written about differences has been limited to specific racial groups, and, to some extent, differences in social class. Our goal in this article has been to shift the dialogue from specific differences to a broader understanding of differences and similarities in general, and to show that these are both a necessary and a fungible part of the process.

To this end, we have proposed a taxonomy of different kinds of social identities and discussed how each of these categories can affect the processes of self-revelation and self-disclosure. Where *race*, *culture*, *sexual orientation*, and/or *social class* are concerned, there are no easy answers, and analysts must struggle with

these issues whenever they come up. We hope that the model proposed here will in some way advance that struggle by providing, in the words of Erikson (1950), "a way of looking at things" (p. 403).

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## COMING OF AGE IN NEW YORK CITY: TWO HOMELESS BOYS

BY ELISABETH YOUNG-BRUEHL, PH.D.

*This paper focuses on two cases, both homeless young gay men living—trying to survive—in New York City. The young men's stories and their manner of being in psychotherapy are presented. One, Hispanic, had developed as an angry, aggressive, manipulative anti-authoritarian; the other, African American, was engaging, passive, exploitable, and full of rescue fantasies. The author raises questions about how humiliating childhood physical and sexual abuse and neglect can become woven into character formations of such opposite sorts. The paper concludes with reflections on the technical challenges of working with homeless youth of color in drop-in center circumstances, and some indication of how the therapeutic process had to be adapted to these young people and their situations.*

While I was working two years ago at a New York City drop-in center for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth, I took into once-a-week psychotherapy a Hispanic 20-year-old and an African American 19-year-old. These two young gay men both had stories in which humiliation was the salient theme, but they had developed so divergently that I constantly found myself trying to formulate the key ingredients of their difference, and to evaluate my experiences with them in that context. I will present them as indications of how one humiliated boy could become an apostle of nonviolence and the other a fantasist of murder. But I also want to indicate the treatment mix—part psychoanalytic psychotherapy,

part sex education, and part social work—that I developed for this clinical situation and for the circumstances the patients had in common with each other and with the center's population, which was more than two-thirds African American, and all in various degrees of homelessness. Along the way, I will describe how I—white, female, old enough to be their great-grandmother (counting in inner-city generations), and bearing the odd title of “psychoanalyst” (as unfamiliar to them as “anthropologist” was to Margaret Mead’s Samoans coming of age eighty years ago)—was viewed by these two shrewd, streetwise, and troubled dudes.

## I.

The African American, tall, strikingly good-looking, very dark-skinned, effeminate in manner, sweet, charming, introduces himself to me by the gender-free name he has assigned himself: “Transformation.” He explains that he likes to think of himself as a new kind of human being, neither male nor female, and filled only with love, not hate. He also certainly does not want to carry the surname of his father, to whom he has given the tag “the sperm donor.” The sperm donor physically abused his wife and five children (Transformation is the third), deserted the family, and went off to marry another woman and have children by her, completely neglecting his first family. This, I came to learn, is the story of Transformation’s life, the emblem of his humiliation: someone else is always getting provided for, while he gets beaten up and cannot get what he needs.

In the foster family where he and his older brother were placed, there was a grandson in residence, a few years older than Transformation, who had “most favored child” status and who bullied and sexually molested him. When the brothers were removed from that home and put in another, with a very strict, single Christian woman as the foster parent, his older brother was favored. Transformation, angry and hard to manage, was put on Ritalin, and had a bad reaction to it—he lost his balance frequently, and once fell over in the shower, almost drowning. He got, as he put it “very

bad" in that home, and at one point when he was fourteen years old, he was put in the adolescent unit of the local psychiatric hospital, a "very weird place." He stayed there for "some really horrible weeks," during which his mother came to visit him, read him storybooks, and tried as best she could to present herself as an able parent so that she could get custody of him. He was finally released into her care and enjoyed a brief idyllic period when he was an only child in her home. This was, he said, his happiest moment. Then his siblings returned, and his mother's boyfriend married her and quickly produced with her three half-siblings. Things did not go well. His stepfather singled him out for ridicule because he confessed at the age of sixteen that he was homosexual.

While living in the two foster homes and when he returned to his mother, Transformation worked very hard in school, imagining that he might be able to "escape my situation" by getting a scholarship. Starting at age ten, he read the newspaper's classified ads every day, hoping to find some kind of job where he could lie about his age and start to make escape money. He had the idea that he could get into politics later and maybe even become the President of the United States. His mother put tremendous pressure on him to get good grades after he came back into her care, because she wanted to impress the Child Protective Services with her prize-winning children. He loved the white teachers at school, and developed another determining idea: that black people—especially very dark ones like him—could never be as good as whites. When his mother beat him, he cried out for one of the white women teachers, and he had a fantasy that he might go home with her and be her boy. Because his mother told him that he was a person with no knowledge and should just do what he was told, he concluded that he was not interesting, so that he should never talk about himself, but only listen to other people. Transformation acknowledged to me that, inside his own head, he had a lot of fantasies about great things he might do and say, but in reality he did only what he was told to do and said very little.

Transformation's dedication to school got him into the twelfth grade, but in the middle of the year, looking forward to gradua-

tion, he found out that he was HIV positive, and that sent him into a downward spiral. His mother, who had often said with great drama that she loved her children “unconditionally,” responded by throwing him out of the house and telling him not to come home again. Devastated and terrified, he wanted to kill himself, and made a suicide gesture with a bottle of Tylenol washed down with a bottle of whiskey. The City of New York took him into a program for homeless and HIV-positive youth, where he got a room, a stipend, and free medical and psychiatric care. Relieved to be “finally in my own place,” he pulled himself together—keeping his medical appointments and doing his best to follow the medication regimen he was put on. But he refused to see the (white) psychiatrist because he thought the man was homophobic. The center where I later met him was, he said, the first place he had ever experienced that was not homophobic. The young white social worker there who was helping him prepare for his GED exam became his adored teacher, and he loved me, especially because, as he marveled every time he came, my memory for what he told me was uncanny to him. He did not know it was possible for anyone to really remember what other people say, and he wondered if he could learn “your trick.”

Through his years of struggle, Transformation has now grown into—as he himself puts it—“a therapist.” He listens to all the troubles of his siblings, his friends, the other youth at our center, and he does whatever he can to help. Under the official radar, he shared the room he had in the city residence and his stipend with a younger gay boy who had also been kicked out of his home. He urged this boy, whom he described as “a leech,” to get help for himself from the welfare system. A lot of our time in therapy is spent trying to figure out how to handle the entire troupe of needy people who are looking to him—whose own existence is so precarious—for help. We explore why he is—and has to be—the caregiver and rescuer.

Transformation is psychologically very astute about other people, and could say of his older brother (now in prison), for example, that “he is still wanting like a child what he didn’t get as a



child.” But he has had great trouble saying what he himself did not get as a child, or considering how the kinds of abuse and neglect he suffered have affected him. His humiliations seem to him normal, nothing out of the ordinary. But he is able to identify his mother’s hypocrisy—her declarations of unconditional love for him and her actions that are constantly so conditional—as his greatest sorrow.

In lovers, he looks for older men who will be affectionate toward him, fathering him and mothering him at once. And his great fear is that any man will find him repellent, “toxic,” because of his HIV-positive status and because of all the bad things about him that he assumes made him into a boy deserving of all his repeated losses of parental love.

As I started work with Transformation, I made a decision that, in this clinical situation, given the patient’s needs and practical pressures, I was going to focus on the character trait that gave him the most trouble, that made his day-to-day life most difficult—and that was his passivity, his willingness to accommodate to others who exploited him. With my second client, described in the next section of this article, I made a similar decision for similar reasons: with young people in welfare programs, struggling to survive, you have to be focused on the difficulties that most clearly stand in the way of survival. For this second client, the key trait was aggressivity, a tendency to explode at “the authorities.” For him, I, as a white person, was not a redeemer, I was an authority, and his transference was correspondingly tumultuous.

## II.

Ricardo, my Hispanic client, also third in a sibling group, is not a rescuer or a caregiver. On the contrary, he is a taker, and is even, on his clever days, a con artist. He is always angling to see what he can get out of people and situations, and it gives him a great deal of pleasure to break rules and flout authority. Needless to say, he has a poor track record as a student and a worker, and he is constantly getting in trouble at the city residence where

he has managed to wrangle himself a bed. His mother threw him out of her house when she found out he had dropped out of a vocational school where he had been enrolled, sacrificing his tuition. He then went to his grandmother's, but found staying with this very strict, religious, and homophobic woman a constant battle.

Ricardo made a little money working at the center where he saw me for therapy, but this was temporary, and he knew he should get a job and get himself some training (he does have a high school diploma, but his skills are very limited). Sometimes, he thinks that he would like to be a counselor like the counselors at the center, all either white or African American, who are very good to him, but the few times he has tried to lead workshops about homelessness for younger boys, he has found it humiliating to talk about being homeless—"it makes me feel like a loser."

Ricardo is a fast, witty, and vivid talker in Spanish, as well as in good but heavily accented English, which many Anglos have trouble understanding. Their trouble is their problem, he says; how he speaks is who he is, and "fuck you." His anger is palpable, although he says that it was much worse before he encountered a young, white, female social work intern at one of the city shelters, who did a good job of helping him realize that he had to control his anger or he would get nowhere in life. I experienced his anger directly at the beginning of our second session, when he told me sharply that I was three minutes late and he was taking that as a "diss." After letting off some steam about how I had mistreated him, he was able to tell me that, when he was a boy, his mother had kept him waiting every day of his life; she never came when she said she would, and he was often sitting on a bench at the Projects until midnight, by himself, until she staggered home drunk. She refused to let him have a house key of his own.

In the first weeks, Ricardo came into our sessions and immediately plunked down on the table between us his flashy silver cell phone, his most prized possession. If it rang, he picked it up and talked for a while before telling his caller, "Gotta go, I'm doin' a deal," as though I were his client in a drug deal. It took us quite

a while to work our way through the meaning of this phone behavior, which in many ways held the meaning of his life.

To begin with, the phone had been given to him by the supervisor at a city residence, a man who had put a move on Ricardo sexually. Ricardo was thrilled by this advance, because he realized immediately that he could blackmail the man. He arranged to have the next sexual advance witnessed, and then threatened to “go to the cops” unless the supervisor bought him a cell phone and paid the bills for it. I asked Ricardo what he thought I would do with this information, and he grinned at me: “Whatever, who cares?” He was constantly scheming to get back at people who had, in his estimation, gotten away with something or dissed him personally.

At one point, the patient hatched a plan to get a group of his friends to beat up a boy in the residence who had crossed him, and while he was detailing his plan to me, enjoying his own cleverness, he went flying off into a fantasy about how he might use his switchblade on this boy and “spill his fuckin’ guts all over the sidewalk.” Ricardo did not carry out the beating plan, and, in fact, he has never acted violently—he is all talk and fantasy—because he is afraid of getting killed. The phone is his weapon; being connected through it is his proof to himself that he is a big man, a dude, a powerhouse, able to order other people around. He wants to impress me with how often his phone rings and how adroitly he uses it to “carry on business”—that is, to arrange petty drug deals. Eventually, I got him to put both the phone and his switchblade in his knapsack before he came into our sessions; but he mocked my rule: “You is never gonna get my complete attention—I don’t never give complete attention to nobody.”

It took Ricardo quite a number of weeks to get to his central scene of humiliation, and even when he got there, he would not “go into the details.” He had never told anyone before that, between the ages of six and eight, he had been repeatedly taken out to the playground behind the Projects at night and raped by some teenage boys. He told me that he went along at first, up to a certain point, but then the boys would not stop. He would not

say how often this happened or whether he was the only victim. There was a particular place—he called it “a pit”—where they took him, and when they had finished they left him there, sobbing. “They called me some names in Spanish that I am never gonna tell you what they mean.” He was very happy to tell me, however, that one of those boys had later been shot dead in a street fight, and another was in prison for armed robbery.

As he was telling me this, Ricardo realized that he could have gotten these boys in serious trouble if he had told anyone what they did, and he wondered why he had not done so. I pointed out to him that, since then, he had often tried to get people who had treated him badly into trouble—like the supervisor. “Yeah,” he agreed, “I do that all the time. But not then. I guess I was just too little.” He would not explore this topic any further at the time.

Like Transformation’s father, Ricardo’s had deserted his family and gone off to establish another one. But Ricardo, unlike Transformation, is openly furious, hating his father. He did not find a name (like “the sperm donor”) in order to isolate his affect; instead, he rages at “the fucking, no-good, dumb-ass bastard.” And he carries this rage over into his feelings about his mother’s current boyfriend, who is a “macho dickhead.” This man tells the mother what to do and she does it: “I have no respect for her, she is weak. She is a cunt—’scuse me for saying that word to you, a lady.” He entertains fantasies of popping the boyfriend’s head off with a gun or cutting his throat.

Ricardo’s themes about adults are monotonous: women are weak and betray you; men—“father figures,” his former therapist taught him to call them—are macho and should be killed. Ricardo himself does not ever want to be viewed as a woman, a weak woman. When he started sleeping with men at age eighteen, he was “a bottom,” but now he likes more to be “a top,” and being “like a girl” now makes him very uncomfortable. However, he thinks it best to be “versatile” and thus attractive to all kinds of men who might have something to offer—especially money and food.

When Ricardo was sixteen, he was sent to the South for a summer to live with some relatives of his mother's, who were paid to keep him. His memory of this time was vague (and this vagueness, of course, made me feel that he had dissociated something crucial). For some reason, he did not return for school in September, and during the next ten months, while he stayed on, he did not go to school at all. He smoked a lot of pot, got sexually active with some of the local girls, and generally behaved badly; so perhaps his mother did not want him to come back—he is not sure. The relatives just kept him “because they got paid.” Everybody was exploitative and “a phony,” he said, landing on Holden Caulfield's word. He knows that when he did return home, he closed himself into his room for several months; on emerging, he was “this angry person who got in trouble all the time.” And he got “very into pot,” because he had discovered in the South that you could “get out of yourself with that shit” and just forget everything. “I don't ever do crack or heroin 'cause the people who do them is very bad and they kill you if you look at them wrong. An' I like how pot make you feel—it's a drug to make you forget.”

Two months before he came to see me, Ricardo had seen a white male psychiatrist in order to qualify for placement in a city residence. The psychiatrist had diagnosed him as manic-depressive in a single session, prescribed medications that he could get for free, and sent him on his way without arranging any follow-up. Ricardo took the meds until the prescription ran out and then stopped, abruptly, after he had looked up *manic-depression* on the Internet and figured he had been accused. He wanted to know if I thought he was manic-depressive and should be on drugs. I told him I could hear and see that, when he was thinking about killing someone, he got very excited and full of wild talk, and that when he was afraid and lonely, he isolated himself from me and shut up. “Either way, you're not here with me.”

“That's not an answer!” he snapped. “Do you think that man was right?”

“I think you think he dissed you and gave you drugs instead of attention.”

“He was a fuckin’ asshole I shoulda beat up.”

“When that beat-him-up idea runs out, you’re going to feel depressed.”

“Don’t read my fuckin’ mind, you’re spazzin’ me out.” That is how Ricardo would typically tell me that he had taken in what I had said, or at least accepted my attention to him, to us, as not like that of “the authorities.” He had more trouble with my interest in his childhood and adolescence.

Ricardo says that the best way to live is to leave the past behind; otherwise you just can’t enjoy anything in the present. If he remembers about the abuse that happened when he was a kid, or what happened when he was in the South, he says, then he cannot enjoy being with men. “You shrinks think you have to go into the past,” he tells me, mockingly, but this is really not for him. He does not like to be vulnerable, and if you get close to people, you get vulnerable, so he does not reveal himself or get close.

During the time we worked together, however, Ricardo did meet an African American boy his own age whom he really liked, and he tried to get close—he even told the boy about his childhood abuse experience. He did not consciously register that our relationship had in any way opened a path to this experience, but he felt a connection: “I told him more than I told you, because he’s not a lady and because he got fucked up bad himself, so he knows.” With deep sympathy, he went on to tell me that his boyfriend thought that he had “a kinda small dick because some guy sucked him off real hard, you know, like with his teeth.”

I asked Ricardo if he thought that he himself had been injured.

“When I got zits in high school, I thought it was AIDS and I would die.”

“Do you practice safe sex?”

“When I’m the bottom.”

Ricardo’s policy was, of course, consistent with his equations of passivity with injury, receptivity with humiliation. Whoever is really on top of things and people is invulnerable.

## III.

It seems to me that Ricardo's adolescent year in the South was a time when he tried to bury his earlier abuse experience, using marijuana as his helper and making futile efforts at sleeping with girls. But it is the period in the South that he cannot now remember, and the earlier experience continues to haunt him. He is still trying to cut off the past. By contrast, Transformation remembers everything, and has tried to blunt his feelings by normalizing his story and (his reaction formation) by being sweet to everybody. I think we can see in these contrasting defenses that the more humiliating acts are dissociated (both unconsciously and by conscious effort), the more they feed, like underground springs, into the sense of rage and the desire to humiliate others, the thirst for revenge.

Another key (and related) difference between these two young men speaks to the nature of humiliation itself. The further a humiliation takes you down, the more powerful the effect of it in the unconscious. In this respect, Transformation's cumulative humiliation was greater than Ricardo's, although Ricardo's sexual abuse was, in terms of its violence and in terms of how abandoned he felt as he suffered it, worse.

As a small child, before his father left, Transformation seems to have felt that his mother's love really was—this is the word he uses, her word—"unconditional." The violent father's departure, as he felt it, was the end of his mother's love; she became an enraged and humiliated person, forever licking her wounds, not caring for him. His loss of favored-child status then began to haunt him. But it was his idealized life before the fall, without conditions, that gave him ground later, when he had been humiliatingly molested, to produce an omnipotent fantasy (or reproduce an old one in a new key). His fantasy was that he would become the President of the United States, the Number-One man (who has traditionally been a white man); and now his Transformation fantasy is that he is a unique being, beyond gender and not a victim of any prejudice.

Transformation's white female teachers have helped him take a step out of poverty, but, at the same time, he imagines that he will never be anything but humiliated, because his mother had told him repeatedly that he knew nothing and should keep quiet, and because he is her darkest child. He was split. Ricardo did not have so far to fall. He never imagined that his mother loved him unconditionally, or even that she cared to come home from the bar. She was not there for him long before his father left. The difference was immediately clear in the transference. Ricardo came into the treatment expecting me to "diss" him, as his mother had (and as he expected all adults to do), while Transformation came into the treatment expecting me to be a white teacher/mother who would love him (although he did have to test me early on to make sure that I would not find his HIV-positive status repulsive and a cause for rejection, as his mother had).

Let me put this contrast between the two patients in conceptual terms. Humiliation involves extremes; it is not merely being taken down a notch. And the more extreme the humiliation—especially the paradigmatic humiliation, which all others reference and build upon—the more extreme the compensating fantasy of restoration and recovery or retaliation. But it is not the case that violence is proportional to the extremity of the overcoming fantasy, as a means to achieve its promise. Transformation, with his omnipotent fantasy, was the less violent of these two young men. Ricardo was the more violent and, although there are many factors at play in his violence, one of the most important was that his compensating expectations were not beyond achieving. He did not want to be President of the United States; he only wanted to get a cell phone by blackmail or to assert his dominance in his residence over someone who had dissed him. No sense of racial inferiority inhibited Ricardo, and he did not react to my whiteness in the transference, but only to my "lady" status (that is, I am not like his mother; I have knowledge and culture, and I give attention).

The matter of violence is different, it seems to me, with young men who actually carry out violent deeds, often after consider-



able premeditation—like school shooters. They do have extreme fantasies for restoring lost power, stemming from great losses (whether or not of maternal love, primarily—that is, before the experience of being bullied, abused, or defeated). But they lack Transformation's reaction formations, his conversion into a caretaker, a person who tries to make others feel special as he would like to feel himself. And they have some kind of comrade in arms, or gang, or instigator to violence, who supplements them, makes them feel more able to fulfill their fantasies.

Another key difference between the two young men I treated is in their attitudes toward their fathers and their abusers. Both were angry at their mothers for turning away from them, for not loving and not protecting, for favoring other children and submitting to boyfriends—although Transformation was the more disappointed in the sense that he thought of himself as having once been loved. But Ricardo was actively raging at his father and at his male abusers, consciously transferring that rage onto every older male figure in his life; he would like to kill any and all the "father figures." Ricardo identified with the aggressor; he wanted to be macho and invulnerable and to make lovers of his own age group suffer his manipulations. He was the type of young man who, given a group or gang to protect him, would become violent. (This was not likely to happen because of his being openly gay.)

But Transformation, in his characteristic way, blunted his anger with dismissal of his "sperm donor." He intellectualized and was wrapped in his reaction formations. And he dismissed all male traits in himself—he feminized himself, disidentifying with his father, while he looked for love from older men who would be, he hoped, good fathers—which meant quite maternal and nonviolent, like he himself. But the men he chose were, in fact, not so much parental as inept and inexperienced, so they practiced unsafe sex—giving Transformation the opportunity to express his anger indirectly.

This indirect expression is important to examine. Once, during the time he was in treatment with me, Transformation had un-

protected sex with an older man who did not know that Transformation was HIV positive (and did not ask anything about his sexual history). Transformation was really baffled about why he had allowed himself to have unsafe sex “in the heat of the moment, really turned on by this guy,” when he had been so carefully trained in his city program never to have sex without all male parties using condoms. Initially, because he thought of himself as Transformation, all-love and no-hate, he found very threatening my question about whether he might have been angry at his partner, or used his partner to express anger, asserting himself and his force (as it were, the force of being an instrument of destruction). But he was eventually able to explore the question with me. He could remember that he had felt that the man had dissed him by not taking responsibility for having safe sex and not caring enough about Transformation to ask him about his sexual history (or demonstrate in some way an ability to be sympathetic to an HIV-positive man). The man deserved “a payback.” “When he put himself at risk, he was saying he didn’t care anything about me.”

When his anger trumps his good intentions and his training, Transformation (unconsciously) makes a sexual encounter into a test, and it was the purpose of my psychodynamic sex education to help him explore this testing. If the test showed him that he was not respected, he used the weapon he had—his illness. Conversely, Ricardo used his wits, and was much more conscious of what he was doing—like a con artist—although he was much *less* conscious of *why* he did what he did, much less conscious of the humiliation at the root of his manipulateness. He viewed disease transmission as a battle in which the smart win and the stupid lose. In an AIDS prevention workshop, Ricardo had gotten advice to “wear a rubber, no matter what, no matter when,” and he reacted to this by saying that the man who delivered the advice was obviously so “afraid for his own little butt” that someday some guy would “show him who’s boss” by raping him.

As Transformation and Ricardo told me more about their sexual behavior and their understandings of it, I could tailor the sex education I did with them to their ways of thinking, their

anxieties and fantasies. This is, of course, especially important for humiliated men, for whom disease transmission becomes part of a power play or a playing field for masochistic behavior.

#### IV.

So far, I have been showing what kind of psychoanalytic psychotherapy work was possible with these boys, and how it could be interwoven with safe-sex education. But I found that I also wanted to do a particular kind of social work with them: not the sort they got from the center's social workers, who helped with housing, job training, GED preparation, money, food, and medical attention, but instead to do a sort of social work that might be called *empowerment through self-knowledge*. For this, I drew on storytelling traditions that both patients had known from their grandparents, and used my many years as a teacher to appeal through their quick intelligences to their emotions. I thought of this as the August Aichhorn part of my work.

One day, I made Ricardo very happy by giving him some new English words—"white people's power words," he called them. He had been telling me about a knife fight that took place the night before in front of his shelter. A boy he knew had ended up with a gash that nearly took his face off, and the medics had come and taken him off to the emergency room. "That's the end of fuckin' around with girls for that dude. He gonna look gross, like a Frankenstein," Ricardo commented. And then he went off into one of his fantasies about how he might use his knife to disfigure a guy who had beaten him up a few days earlier, leaving Ricardo with an ugly bruise on his own face. "He made this beautiful boy look bad, an' he deserve to get cut up bad."

As I often did to slow him down and get his attention, I set off on a story that he would have to (and he had come to know that he would have to) hear out in order to get to the point I wanted to make. He indulged me because he is a very curious, smart guy who is hungry for knowledge, and he views me as (so he put it in his drug-dealer lingo) "my very own source." "You got

education, an' I got nothin,'" he had once remarked when he wanted me to explain something to him.

So, my story was about a woman named Anna Freud who, I explained, had been one of the first people to use the ideas that I myself had learned when I studied to be a psychoanalyst. She had worked with children and adolescents almost a hundred years ago in a big European city with some areas that were just as rough as where he lived. I sketched a little picture of Anna Freud's clinic in Vienna and gave some examples of the kinds of homeless kids who wandered the streets there after the First World War. One little boy, age five, I said, came to her office a day after he had been to the dentist, where he had been surprised by a very painful drilling that had made him cry. He entered wearing a cardboard helmet and carrying a long wooden sword, which he flourished all through the session, stabbing at imaginary enemies and vaunting over imaginary corpses. Anna Freud, I told Ricardo, had described this little boy as "identifying with the aggressor."

I wrote this phrase down for him and explained in some detail how it applied to the little boy, who had turned his suffering into making other people suffer in fantasy. Ricardo got the picture immediately. "So what you're saying is, you think that when I get hurt, I want to hurt someone."

"Yes, that's what I'm saying, and I think it started with you when you were about that boy's age, about five."

"You shouldn't give Ricardo all that psychology," Transformation later chided me. "He's out there in the art room talking big, like a white man, like he knows it all. He told us he is 'identified with the aggressor.' And he told me I'm not like that, but if I would just get like that, I wouldn't get fucked over so much."

I briefed Transformation on the concept that Ricardo was parading to the kids in the next room, and said I thought that Ricardo was pretty astute in his judgment that Transformation was not identified with the aggressor. He agreed and told me why not: "I think you get power by being good, not bad. I'm identified with Jesus—who was a good white man. Or a kind of beyond-gender man." This remark gave us an excellent opening to explore fur-

ther his rescuer behavior, and the reasons why—to speak in conceptual terms—his ego ideal needed to be white (and why I could so easily contribute to it).

## V.

The work that I did with these young men did not progress to anything like a natural termination. The funding for my work was withdrawn in one of those institutional crises and reorganizations that doom most efforts to do longer-term psychotherapy with homeless youth, and I had to use the last eight sessions we were granted to consolidate what we had done. We were all three very sad—and Ricardo was very angry—that we had to stop, but they both chalked it up to necessity: “That’s the way the world is.” Transformation, making his last test to be sure that I did not find him “toxic,” asked to hug me goodbye, and I kissed him on his cheeks; Ricardo gave me a hug without asking, and warned me solicitously to watch my back on the street going home.

I had given each of them my business card when we parted, and said I would be glad to hear from them if I could do anything for them in the future. Transformation has not called, but six months later, Ricardo did. “Hey, Elisabeth, it’s your aggressor,” he joked when I picked up the phone. But he was not in good shape. After months of looking, he still had no job, no money, and he was angry at everybody, even the staff at the drop-in center, where his work contract had come to an end.

We arranged for him to come downtown to my private office for six sessions (pro bono, and the center gave him a Metrocard to make the trips) in which I helped him navigate a transition to a new city-run living situation, where there is a therapy program. Partly, he came to see me because of the practical requirement that he get a referral to the therapy program from a clinician who knew him, but partly also because he wanted to get what he called (not quite fluent in my language, but emotionally accurate) “a refreshing course.” Our focus was on how he might get off on a good foot at the residence by trying to be cooperative. “I know, I know,” he said. “No knife, no bullshit, no breakin’ rules.”

\* \* \* \* \*

From two treatments of only six months' duration, with unplanned terminations, not much on a general level can be learned about the theme of this issue of *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, race in the clinical situation, although concepts can be clarified, as I have tried to show, about the psychodynamics of humiliation and powerlessness, and illustration can be given of how an analytic therapist can function as an empowerer, which is how I viewed myself, for young people living at the bottom of the social barrel, alienated from their families and facing racial or ethnic—or, more generally, cultural—and sexual-identity prejudices. But I would like to return now to some technical features of the work I did in order to offer a few concluding reflections.

In a clinical situation like this one, with a very literal preexisting frame (a white woman of obvious education and privilege sits in a tiny, dingy, dirty office down the hall from a big room full of our society's racial and sexual outcasts), few of the usual psychoanalytic clinical mores and rules apply. First and foremost, the treatment was free, and any idea that it is a good thing for the client to pay or try to pay for the treatment was completely irrelevant. In fact, one of the most important features of the treatment was that it was free; it was reparative, a corrective economic experience. The work that my clients did was to get themselves to our sessions on time without being high on anything and without being diverted by any of their characteristic diversions. (Transformation once struggled mightily over whether to come see me or go to a city shelter with one of his friends to help her fill out a form; Ricardo had to give up seeing me on occasions when he could be "poppin'" at the center of some kind of scene, or "getting Macked out" if somebody offered to treat him to the one and only kind of meal he craved.)

Second, there was the matter of how we were going to communicate. After our first sessions, it became clear to me that I was going to have to operate in a *mélange* of two languages: the gay, African American, youth—subculture, rapper-inflected, up-to-the-minute lingo of the drop-in center, which is teasingly sarcastic and

campy (among the “queeny” males, everyone is “Daahling”), as well as quite sexual and vulgar by white or black or Hispanic middle-class standards; and my own normal dialect, which is white, middle class, and rather literary. (Transformation remarked that I didn’t sound like I came from any place, but from, like, maybe a book . . . he loved instructing me in his vocabulary: “Elisabeth, ‘prick’ is just like so-so retro.”)

By working with their English (I cannot speak Spanish) as well as my own, and playing with the differences, I could both show them respect—I often asked them to teach me the meanings of expressions they used that I did not understand—and steer as clear as possible of patronization or any form of colonialism. That is, I did not try to speak their language, only to be able to understand it and to use it, so to speak, in quotation marks. All therapists, of course, work out a shared lexicon (full of shorthand) with each client; but I went much further than that in this clinical situation, as would an anthropologist who was learning a language in order to be able to enter into a culture at all. By being a student, I was trying to model for them what might be called cultural navigation, which they would need if they were ever to sail out of their ghettos and into the surrounding world (where I can go without much suffering), a world in which they will find hostility, for sure, but also help—if they are able to recognize helpers and receive the help—and, eventually, ways to give what they have to offer.

In line with the communication principle to “begin where you find yourself,” I began in the treatments themselves with the societal situation that both these young men judged to be the most threatening to them: the situation of being gay in a homophobic society. For them, this trumped all racial, ethnic, or cultural threats or prejudices, and it even trumped poverty. Transformation was constantly aware of his blackness (I told him about the theorist of negritude Fanon, and he made himself a name tag to wear at the center, *Negridude*, which everybody thought was very cool when he parsed it for them), and was also aware of prejudice focused on it from whites and from lighter blacks. But, for

him, his gayness and his HIV status were the current life determiners. So I explored this experience with him, and only gestured at how important it would eventually be for him to explore the connections between being black and being gay. Gay people, in Transformation's view, are unlovable and hurtful to those they love (and he has the same view of black blacks); to Ricardo, a gay person is one who gets dissed and must spend his life attacking back or be crushed. Their core anxieties are different, as anxiety over loss of love is a different phenomenon from castration anxiety. (Translated into characterological, diagnostic terms, Transformation's defense system was clingy and hysterical, and Ricardo's was wounded and narcissistic, near the borderline range, which explained why his roller-coaster presentation was interpreted by his psychiatrist as manic-depression.)

But I had also decided to begin, as indicated earlier, in August Aichhorn's manner: by focusing on the crucial character traits causing my clients trouble. This decision led to another one, about how to set up the treatments. With both Transformation and Ricardo, I spent the opening sessions trying to establish a rapport (including a communication rapport), and asking lots of questions about their present practical circumstances and about their histories (and making copious notes after each session so that I could do the memory "trick" that so impressed Transformation). Then I started off a session—the third with Transformation and the fifth with Ricardo—by explaining to each of them what I thought I could do for them.

I made more or less the same little speech to both of them, despite their characterological differences:

By now, I've got some sense of who you are and how you operate; and I've got some sense of what your daily life is like and what shit you have to deal with. You've got people at your shelter and here at the center who can help you get more education, a job, cash to pay rent and feed yourself. What I can do for you is different. You're smart, you know a lot about yourself, but I can help you know yourself better, deeper. And I figure if you know



yourself better, you'll be less likely to fuck yourself up and less likely to get fucked over.

I told them I wanted to help them identify what I called "the patterns," the things they did again and again without realizing it. "Somebody once told me a funny definition of a mad man: it's somebody who does the same thing over and over, always expecting a different result. You seem to me to do the same thing over and over, hoping to . . ." To Transformation, I continued the sentence with "hoping to miraculously get loved." To Ricardo: "hoping to suddenly come out the winner."

After those sessions, my prevailing countertransference feelings with each of them were pretty clear to me. With Transformation, I consistently felt that I wanted to cradle him, soothe him, be as sweet to him as he was to me. He made me very aware of my own rescuer reaction formations, as I could see them in him carried to self-defeating lengths. With Ricardo, I was a little on guard—as he was, watching his back, expecting attack—so I often resorted to slowing him down, pacifying him. When he came to my private office, I had a moment beyond guardedness (the first with him) of wondering whether it would be safe to see him in this unfamiliar frame, so of my world and not his. I wondered if I would be able to handle one of his rages there. But he came in smiling and joking and teasing me that my hair had gotten even grayer in six months, strode around looking at the paintings on my office walls, and said: "This is, like, art—right? Really killer stuff. Your boy likes your crib."

I leave it to the reader to imagine all the layers of meaning in that! (And I offer the hints that *killer* means awesome and powerful, and *crib* is a Harlem and Spanish Harlem jive word for home or apartment.)

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## IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

BY KIMBERLYN LEARY, PH.D., ABPP

During the fall of 2005, typing into the Google search engine the keywords *Katrina*, *woman*, and *flag* called up a singular image: that of an elderly African American woman, wrapped in a blanket patterned after the American flag, huddling in the rain outside of the New Orleans Convention Center (see Figure 1 on the following page). This photo (the original in color) was taken on August 31 by Eric Gay for the Associated Press, two days after the neglected levees of New Orleans gave way. It was widely reprinted in both the domestic and international press. The woman in the picture is 87-year-old Milvertha Hendricks. A second photo (Figure 2 on the following page), taken by photojournalist Alan Chin two days later on September 2 and published in *Newsweek*, finds Milvertha Hendricks still wrapped in the American flag blanket, still sitting outside the convention center, but now slumped in her chair, staring down into her lap, her face away from the camera. This photo appeared in black and white.

In an influential book on picture theory and visual culture, Mitchell (2005) argues that “a picture” is commonly understood to be “the entire situation in which an image has made its appearance, as when we ask someone if they ‘get the picture’” (p. xiv). He notes that the essence of our contemporary media culture (in which, for instance, *Googling* is recognized as an intelligible verb) is, to a critical degree, visual. Quoting Heidegger (1977), Mitchell proposes that the present moment is distinguished by the way in which the world is conceived and grasped as *picture*. Images, he

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The author dedicates this essay to her father, Herbert Joseph Leary, Jr.



FIGURE 1



FIGURE 2

suggests, insinuate themselves beyond reflections, mirrors, or representations of the social and material worlds that we inhabit. Instead, they become among the ways we construct, create, and make those worlds (Goodman 1978). Calling for a poetics of pictures (or a study of the lives of images), Mitchell suggests that it is incumbent upon us to ask of pictures “not just what they mean or do but what they *want*—what claim they make upon us, and how we want to respond” (p. xv). For Mitchell, the picture-beholder relation is the province of mutual desire. In our terms, it is an intersubjective field.

It is self-evident that Hurricane Katrina caused catastrophic destruction across the region of the Gulf of Mexico. The traumatic suffering continues to a staggering degree, with only ambiguous trajectories for significant remediation in plain sight. What, then, does it mean to “get the picture”? What is the “entire situation” in which an elderly black woman’s shelter from the storm is a thin comforter imprinted with an American flag? Does Milvertha Hendricks make a claim on us? And if so, how are we to respond?

The history and practice of race in America constitutes, of course, the entire situation in which Katrina’s images make their appearance. The camera’s eye exposed the determinative consequences of racial and ethnic disparities in education, income, and resources with respect to how a life is likely to be lived—and how (and even whether) that life is to be rescued and recuperated. The recurrent question “why didn’t they leave” assumes at its foundation subjective and material alternatives incommensurate with an appreciation of the realities attending generational poverty among the urban underclass. It is a reality that is deeply painful to contemplate in the context of American democratic ideals.

And so we don’t.

In keeping with this, it is not so surprising that Katrina’s victims—the most vulnerable among them black and poor—have symbolically lost their citizenship, becoming for a time “refugees,” without a country, until a new class of persons (“evacuees”) was created to distinguish them, one that only nominally preserves

their link to us. To “get the picture” is to take into one’s sight the delicate and fragile balance that exists between those whom we call *other* and those we claim as like ourselves. And it is to know how easily that balance may collapse.

This journal’s collection of psychoanalytic writing on race, ethnicity, and culture in the consulting room was conceived of years before this season of storms. Whatever else it does, it must now function also as a set of responses to the claim that Milvertha Hendricks makes on our attention, simply on the basis of her presence among us.

\* \* \* \* \*

It is a privilege to be invited to comment on the twelve papers that comprise this special issue of *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*. Collectively, these authors take up a considerable range of topics, including the very meaning of race and its social construction (Altman, Dalal, Layton, and Smith and Tang); the traumatic impact of racism, ethnocentrism, and “othering” (Apprey, Hamer, Holmes, and Moss); and the psychology of stereotyping (e.g., Cheng). Other papers introduce distinctions in existing psychoanalytic concepts that definitively extend their range (for example, Akhtar’s “cultural neutrality” and Gu’s “the filial piety complex” as a variation on the oedipal). Some contributors go further (Young-Bruehl), exploring innovations in practice and technique that permit us to listen to a range of voices that usually do not reach psychoanalytic ears.

This group of contributing colleagues is further distinguished by their ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity, the breadth of their academic and clinical interests, the plurality of psychoanalytic models that they represent, and by the psychoanalytic organizations with which they affiliate. Worthy of special note is the intellectual generosity that they extend to each other. Although all of these papers were written independently, there is felicitous overlap in their areas of concern. Most often, these authors try to incline themselves to the intentions of other writers, including those not represented in this volume, and treat competing ideas as authen-

tic differences of opinion to which one may respond with deep curiosity. All convey the sensibility that genuine learning means taking in new ideas and, in the process, discomfiting oneself.

Equally noteworthy is where these authors abstain from debate and discussion. Although all are mindful of psychoanalytic traditions that previously might have confined their territory to areas of applied analysis or “sociology” (that is, as not really “psychoanalytic”), these authors do not in the main attempt to justify their projects as anything other than the stuff with which all psychoanalysts ought to engage. Some approach this matter pragmatically. Akhtar notes that, along with an increase in a patient base that is culturally diverse, many analysts teach and supervise culturally diverse trainees in psychology, social work, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis.

Dalal, Layton, Moss, and Altman are among those who put forth more radical propositions. They argue, for instance, that identity experiences—including those organized in accord with being white—are fundamentally social. Dalal puts it succinctly when he writes that “the *I* is constituted by the varieties of *we* that one is born into” (p. 145).

In this sense, identity is made political. Sharp divisions do not inhere among the psychical, the social, and the political. The corollary, of course, would imply that psychoanalytic accounts of identity must also be understood to be matters of politics as well. The consulting room is defined not as a place apart, but as another venue in which the social takes form.

Moss takes a rather controversial position (to my way of thinking) when he asserts that the theory and practice of psychoanalysis are incompatible with what he calls the theory and practice of racism. He is eloquent when he argues that internal to the clinical relationship is the patient who says “no” to the manner and particulars of the analyst’s interpretation. It is this exchange of “no’s,” according to Moss, that makes psychoanalysis a form of political discourse, as the capacity to say “no” represents a claim to sovereignty.

Possibly this is true, perhaps in the abstract, and potentially when we regard psychoanalysis philosophically rather than historically. Holmes would seem to offer a distinctive “no” to Moss’s proposition in terms of our specific practices. She helps us to appreciate everyday limitations in analytic work that fail to challenge racism and classism, as when she deftly deconstructs Moskowitz’s experience with his analyst (pp. 221-222) to show that the analytic process stopped short of genuine recognition that black men might indeed really have something that (white men) might fear and envy. It is also the position from which Apprey speaks when he writes about the “provocation” that exists when his patient must face the “integrity” of blackness (p. 78).

In retheorizing Freud’s account of success neurosis, Holmes contends that real factors like race and poverty present people with disavowing messages that are internalized in the mind in primary ways. Dalal confirms this view in his critique of psychoanalytic theories that do not take into account the fact that external circumstances, and not just fantasies, can play a causal role in and of themselves in the structuring of internal distress. Holmes sees something similar in her consulting room when she writes of racialized others and/or those reared in poverty who unconsciously regard social progress and personal success as akin to “essential ‘crime’[s]” (p. 219). She notes that, unlike the fantasized oedipal transgressions foundational to Freud’s original construct, disrupting one’s assigned status and position constitutes a social violation-for-real. In such a context, material and psychological gain is often achieved at the price of isolation, alienation, and censure.

Later in her paper, Holmes argues forcefully that various entities within organized psychoanalysis (such as the American Psychoanalytic Association’s Board on Professional Standards) must, in effect, act with all deliberate speed to ensure that issues of racism and classism are addressed in psychoanalytic training curricula. While this is not the subject of their contributions here, Layton and Altman are among the analysts who have played important

roles in advancing multicultural agendas within their psychoanalytic organizations.

Most of these authors subscribe to the perspective that racial and cultural identities are best understood as social constructions and narrative intelligibilities, rather than as matters of essential disposition. This is the context in which Smith and Tang describe racial identity as “performative” (p. 296), Layton refers to coherent identities as “oppressive fictions” (p. 238), and Hamer reminds us that the content of racial projections is local and will vary over time and across venues. Dalal picks up the same theme when he observes that the stranger knocking at your door will elicit different associations depending on whether the stranger is black or white, male or female. Importantly, he also notes that one’s reaction also depends substantively on who is opening the door and where the door is located. This relation between beholder and beheld is the moment that shapes the entrance of race into the consulting room (as Smith describes in his introduction, p. 4).

Moss proposes the metaphor of mapping to orient us to the complexity of this terrain, arguing that difference is read on the vertical axis hierarchically, in terms of idealized and degraded identities. The horizontal axis plots our intimacy or distance from those mapped as other. Smith and Tang, likewise, offer for our consideration a taxonomy of social identities, ranging from the innate and visible (such as race and gender) to those that are acquired or achieved (partnered, political, and professional identities). They argue that these categories for identity may also be distinguished on the basis of whether or not they are voluntarily adopted.

At the same time, Smith and Tang alert us to enduring conundrums when they note that the press had referred to Essie-Mae Washington-Williams as the “biracial daughter” of the late Strom Thurmond, while Illinois Senator Barak Obama, the son of a Kenyan father and a white mother, is understood to be “black.” They make the crucial point that it is always important to investigate who is empowered to make these determinations, appreci-



ating the antecedent histories on which such distinctions are made.<sup>1</sup>

In contesting the assumption that race has any real prerogative of its own, these authors self-consciously walk an exceedingly complicated line. Dalal—whose work is discussed by several of the other contributors here—seems, at first glance, to push the envelope most extensively. He begins his paper with a moment of surprise that a colleague traveling on a London train, in which she was the only white person in her carriage, could have conceivably felt alone: “How is it,” he asks, “that she *feels* alone when patently she is not?” (p. 131, italics in original).

Unlike Altman, who describes a similar critical moment when black and white encounter one another on a deserted street late at night (pp. 61-63), Dalal rejects the subjective sense of alienation and threat experienced by his colleague as a meaningful unit. He argues that differences between *us* and *them* are in some crucial sense illusory, that it is impossible to specify an essence of a particular *us*. In this, he is, of course, correct—when we deploy philosophical rather than phenomenological terms. Dalal, himself British, writes:

When we look directly at the British *us*, we find not homogeneity, but heterogeneity: vegetarians, whites, landlords, Kleinians, Scots, blacks, football hooligans, accountants, Christians, Moslems, fascists, liberals, and so on. And if one turns one’s attention to each of these sub-groupings, they, too, dissolve into further arrays of diversity. [p. 150]

<sup>1</sup> During slavery, for example, the sexual exploitation of enslaved African women and girls was commonplace. The children from these unions, being “neither fully white nor fully Negroes” (Russell, Wilson, and Hall 1992), existed in ambiguous legal terrain and could not for a time necessarily be counted as legal slave property. Efforts to consolidate white economic power resulted in what was called the *one-drop rule*. This rule stated that children with any black ancestry—those with even “one drop of black blood”—would be defined and treated as black persons (Davis 1991). It is important to note the way in which imaginary contents of this sort (“black blood”) create material forms of oppression (Gubar 1997).

Although he does not note it here, to be “British” in these very multitudes is also the result of a very particular set of historical circumstances, culminating in the post-colonial milieu in which Dalal’s ideas take shape.

Dalal does raise a most relevant question, and one that takes us back to the particulars of everyday subjective experiences, when he asks, “How and why do we come to experience one encounter as taking place *across a difference*, and another as *within a region of similarity*?” (p. 151, italics in original). His answer is that we evoke differences to make a differentiation, an act that he recognizes depends upon a continual shoring up to bolster the identity being safeguarded, a perspective shared by Moss when he maps racism.

Layton, although also skeptical about race as a meaningful category, is more cautious, encouraging us to remain cognizant that this “fiction” is nevertheless contemporaneously a traumatic lived reality for those subject to racism. Moss captures this same tension when he writes that identities, like identifications, are experienced not as outcomes of conflicted desires, but as matters of bodily essence, specifically of blood (p. 273).

Layton investigates the consequences of living within particular class, race, gender, and sexual hierarchies. For Layton, these identities are achieved by splitting human capacities and giving them race or gender designations. Layton argues forcefully that these splits are the occasion of narcissistic wounds—organizing desires that are then lived as class, race, gender, and sexual identities. Identities for Layton are conceived in grief. Who we understand ourselves to be always exists with reference to those who we are told we are not. This link between our grief and our grievances—racial, cultural, ethnic, and otherwise—deserves our deepest consideration.

Altman sounds a similar chord when he takes up *whiteness* as a social identity. Utilizing findings from social psychology, the humanities, and relational psychoanalysis, he explores the myriad

ways that systematic and institutional forms of racism appear to many whites as normative practice, invisible in their sheer sense of being ordinary. Altman suggests that a state of being unreflective (about the machinations of power and privilege) is significantly constitutive of whiteness. From a very different perspective, Smith draws attention to something comparable when he writes of invisible racism in his introduction. As he, Dalal, and Hamer note, it is always important to interrogate the local moment. The crucial question, of course, is for whom are racisms invisible? In his observations, Altman is himself refreshingly candid ("I found myself surprised . . . having never thought about what life is like for black people in those particular ways," p. 57). For Altman, whiteness, then, is principally a fantasy and a way of warding off disquieting feelings of ordinariness, human vulnerability, and constraint, and bringing with it in its wake an imperative to remake the self.

Layton takes on a contiguous set of issues with her Asian patient, Michael, ardently interrogating herself and him about the specific components of the whiteness that each of them is inclined to assign to her as possession, and that function as the patient's passionate and private ambition for himself. At the same time, I am struck by the way that Layton remains restless with theorizing of this sort, including her own. She reminds us that subordinate groups' identities are never fully determined by the power of the dominant group.

In this, I hear the echo of Apprey's compact prose when he writes of the provocation that inheres in blackness that has integrity. Consider also Hamer's dark-skinned but "white" patient (in yet another illustration of evanescent identity categories): it is precisely at the moment that the patient feels Hamer to be an immovable force that he chooses to hurl the one racial epithet that he calculates will be the categorical undoing of his African American analyst. And, importantly, it is not. For Hamer, to be psychoanalytic at such moments is to inquire into what, exactly, his patient has in mind.

Altman acknowledges explicitly that many African Americans are able to effectively resist racist images of themselves—as does Holmes in her reflections on Ruth Simmons, an African American woman raised in the segregated South who is the current president of Brown University. In my view, it is useful to consider that Altman's formulation of whiteness as involving the pursuit of power, of educational opportunities for one's children (as he describes in his clinical example), and of imperatives to enhance the self may function as one of the splits that Layton identifies. Power and remaking the self exist along a gradient of useful adaptation and narcissistic colonization. It would be a mistake to mark them, in and of themselves, as *white*. When Holmes writes of her patients of color who are wrecked by success, she analyzes the internalized demand that the self *not* progress or succeed; the analytic work is not to assist the patient to become or to seek whiteness.

Likewise, when Moss writes of the psychoanalytic parochial *we*, he slips, at times, unwittingly, into the assumption that this *we* is always and inevitably white, occluding from view the very persons it is his objective to include. Dalal's elegant observation—that when the notion of race is taken as fact, the thing called *race* is assumed to be the source and explanation of racism—is undeniably persuasive. At the same time, does it not also leave out Apprey's "sense of history" (p. 74)?<sup>2</sup>

Altman calls upon us to think through the ways in which these differentiations exist in conjunction with political, economic, and psychic agendas, highlighting again that category making is not

<sup>2</sup> For example, what difference does it make to our discussion of Hurricane Katrina's survivors that—according to a CNN website posting of September 2005—during the hurricane season of 1927, the city of New Orleans bowed to the pressure of its white citizens and dynamited a levee just south of the city to redirect flood waters that threatened their homes and businesses? Those same waters then inundated New Orleans' black neighborhoods, causing widespread destruction. This event is described as one of the nodal factors in the migration of African Americans from the South to northern industrial centers during the early twentieth century.

done agnostically.<sup>3</sup> We assign cultural and political work to these differentiations. The black Algerian psychoanalyst and social critic Franz Fanon (1967), for example, argued powerfully that the alienation of the black man can only be understood in the interplay of social, economic, and psychical forces.

Cheng asks equally compelling questions about what it means to authentically recognize and see another or oneself through the lens of racial difference. Beauty and other aesthetic judgments, she observes, are always political. Enthralment or aversion of those designated as *racial other* bespeak common dynamics. Positive and negative stereotypes stand in lieu of actual discernment.

Writing from the domain of psychoanalytically informed literary criticism, Cheng takes as her subject the American black dancer Josephine Baker and her modernist appeal in early twentieth-century Europe, in order to explicate the concept of a racial fetish. Cheng explores the relationship between the Freudian fetish of our clinical theory (as a mechanism to bridge sexual difference and deny female lack) with that of the literary/anthropological construct of a racial fetish, constituted by the insistent rehearsal of stereotypes and apparent celebration of the other's lack.

<sup>3</sup> The sobering lessons of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and its aftermath are instructive. The organized and systematic effort by the Hutu majority to eradicate the Tutsi minority was *not* the product of long-standing disputes between tribes, as is commonly assumed. Instead, Hutu and Tutsi identities were derived originally from differing socioeconomic positions within Rwandan society, distinguishing cultivators (Hutu) from shepherds (Tutsi). The most important determinant of identity was possession of sufficient resources to own a cow. Rwandan identities were therefore somewhat fluid. Hardened distinctions between Hutus and Tutsis were introduced in 1935 by Belgium, the former colonial administration, to consolidate its power. Accordingly, it became difficult to change one's status or ethnic grouping as before. Eventually, identity cards listing one as either Hutu or Tutsi were instituted, culminating in one of the mechanisms that rendered the mass killings devastatingly efficient. Both the abolishment of identity cards post-genocide, and contemporary educational curricula that deemphasize categorization into Hutu and Tutsi in favor of a common Rwandan identity, are part of an *in vivo* social experiment in post-conflict reconciliation and post-traumatic healing. The outcome is far from certain. I am indebted to Margaret Renik and her colleagues at the Institute of Restorative Justice in San Francisco for deepening my understanding of this history. See also <http://www.gov.rw/government/historyf.html>.

In a tightly constructed set of interlocking arguments, Cheng suggests that the 1920s Parisian infatuation “with all things black” (p. 106), as it has been characterized, personified by Baker, constituted a racial fetish. She unpacks Baker’s performances on stage and screen as exemplars of the polarities between savagery and civility that were set up as imaginary constructs on the part of the West, in response to profound anxieties about the cultural transformations of the emerging modern age.

Deconstructing the famous image of Baker clad in a skirt made of ripe bananas, Cheng wants to know what precisely *is* the fetish in this scene. She notes that Baker offers up stereotypes of (black) femininity for a (white) heterosexual male gaze, while serving up that femininity “armed with a ring of . . . fruitful phalluses” (p. 116). Thus, unlike the Freudian fetish that confers some temporary stability in the face of anxiety, the racial fetish precipitates a further crisis of meaning.

Cheng makes a related point in her exploration of Baker’s 1935 film *Princess Tam-Tam*. Baker plays Alwina, a street urchin from Tunisia, who is brought to Europe by the Frenchman Max de Mirecourt as part of an effort to remake his own image. She is passed off to high society as an African princess. When de Mirecourt’s wife becomes jealous, she arranges for Baker to “reveal” herself, plying her with alcohol, as musicians in a nightclub shift to a “jungle beat.” Alwina responds by dancing with abandonment. Cheng describes the film’s intent as the disclosure of Alwina’s true identity (i.e., her blackness).

As Cheng makes clear, what is revealed (remembering Smith and Tang’s attention to distinctions between the revelation and the disclosure of identities) is at once nothing and something. It is not Alwina’s literal blackness that is now evident, but a fantasy, in white eyes, of how black she “really” is. Cheng underscores that the film’s message is also intended to convey (among other things) that class is not enough to overcome racial difference. For Cheng, the film exposes the architecture of fetishistic desire itself and the impossibility of an unmediated gaze.

The clinical psychoanalysts in this issue likewise recognize the impossibility of the unmediated gaze as the essence of stereotype. When Moss discusses what he calls the theory and practice of racism, he uses as illustrative example that “the degraded object of racism is self-evidently dangerous” (p. 292). Smith and Tang, as well as Akhtar and Apprey, indicate that the therapist’s racial, cultural, or ethnic identity can serve as a powerful projective screen. Altman comments on the discriminatory attitudes and values that are built into the very structure of language. Dalal situates the attitudes of the caregiver, informing the infant’s attitudes about itself, as unreflected and outside the scope of consciousness. Apprey understands his psychotic patient’s expectancies about his blackness similarly, as based on so-called sedimentations that are reactivated in the transference. Layton focuses her attention on an aspect of unconscious minding that she calls *normative unconscious processes*, which aim to preserve the status quo. Thinking along the same lines as Cheng, she notes that stereotypes function as fetishes: fixing a signifier to a signified, limiting meaning.

These psychoanalytic perspectives about prereflective and unconscious assessments associated with racial reasoning set the stage for an emergent collaboration between clinical psychoanalysis and the social psychology of automatic processing and procedural memory. The work done by Mazharin Banaji, Anthony Greenwald, and Brian Nosek, and popularized by Malcolm Gladwell (2005) in his book *Blink*, focuses on the role of implicit racial associations in social beliefs and behavior. Using an interactive research tool called the Implicit Association Test (accessible through [www.implicit.harvard.edu](http://www.implicit.harvard.edu)), researchers assess the reaction time required by subjects to make connections between ideas that are already related (usually done quickly and efficiently) and between ideas that do not have easy currency with one another (with reaction times seen to increase to accommodate the additional cognitive load).

Banaji and her colleagues have devised tests of implicit associations for various categories of differences (Gladwell 2005). In the

Racial Implicit Association Test, subjects are tested in two phases. First, the black face is paired with the word *good*, the white face is paired with the word *bad*, and the subject is presented with a list of positively and negatively valenced words. S/he must click on a computer key to indicate whether the new word is associated with the category of *good* or *bad*. In the second condition, the test is repeated. Now the black face is paired with the word *bad* and the white face with the word *good*.

Banaji and her colleagues report that most subjects who have taken these online tests demonstrate pro-white associations—that is, their reaction time on the test is significantly more efficient when the white face is paired with the word *good* and the black face is linked with the word *bad*. In the reverse condition, the subject has to interrupt normative associations and, as Gladwell puts it, must “stop to think” when asked to pair a positively valenced word to a black face. Gladwell (who self-identifies in his book as a biracial man of black and white parents) notes his sense of mortification as he begins to recognize the difficulty he himself experienced as he tried to put words like *glorious* into the *good* category, when *good* was also to be associated with African American.

Gladwell makes the point that implicit beliefs are not likely to override conscious intentions and commitments to social justice. Psychoanalysts, of course, would be less sanguine. Indeed, social psychologists recognize that implicit racisms and ethnocentrism, while distinct, are related to explicit forms of bias (Cunningham, Nezlek, and Banaji 2004). Gladwell does note that there is a considerable body of evidence, some of it cited by Altman in this issue, that implicit attitudes affect how we orient ourselves to others (how close or distant one positions one’s self, whether one smiles and makes eye contact, and so on)—and hence these attitudes shape the relational field. When this field occurs in the context of a job interview or a clinical consultation, the determinations made may have far-reaching consequences. In this way, the accessible, conscious racism described by Hamer in his clini-



cal vignettes is but one of the varieties of racism at play that we must reckon with in our understanding of clinical exigencies in the consulting room—requiring us, we should expect, to face our own mortifications.

Other contributors to this issue emphasize the flexibility in traditional forms of psychoanalytic thinking and technique as they address issues of relevance to racial, cultural, and ethnic issues in the consulting room. Apprey suggests, as Smith notes in his introduction, that difference can function as an invitation. Gu argues persuasively that the Oedipus complex retains universal significance if cultural differences (in this case, between China and the West) in family structure and ways of life are taken into consideration. Gu suggests that under the dominance of the Confucian ethical system, oedipal presentations became so disguised and muted as to appear invisible. In a thoughtful exegesis of traditional premodern Chinese literature and of contemporary film treatments, Gu deftly shows the ways in which, in many cases, relational demands for filial piety are swollen with incestuous desire and driven by fears of parricide. In this work, Gu, after Apprey, offers us an encounter, perhaps a provocative one, with Chinese integrity.

Akhtar affirms the applicability of the psychoanalytic method for all psychologically minded patients, regardless of their racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. He suggests that the immigrant analyst carries an additional burden, that of remaining equidistant from the customary patterns or thoughts and moral dictates of his or her own culture and that of the native patient's. In a series of case examples and clinical vignettes, he explores shifting transference-countertransference patterns that reflect associations to ethnicity and culture (though he is also careful to note that, in his experience, such differences may have no significance). In one especially rich clinical moment, he shares nuanced reflections attending his decision not to speak—in his mother tongue—a line of Urdu poetry pertaining to the material presented by his patient

(whose racial designation is not mentioned, but who did not speak Urdu). He indicates, in a manner resonant with Layton's, the sense of loss and helplessness attending the recognition of difference.

It is Young-Bruehl who offers perhaps the most radical of challenges to our customary psychoanalytic creed, be it relational, Kleinian, self psychological, or ego psychological. Young-Bruehl expands the realm of the consulting room to include a New York City drop-in center for gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth. She introduces us to two young men, Transformation and Ricardo, the likes of whom are seldom seen on the pages of psychoanalytic journals. Their worlds are bounded by homelessness, abject victimization, mindless violence, generational poverty, inadequate education, and the horror of disease transmission used as a weapon (Transformation is HIV positive). Underscoring a clinical model that she describes as a *mélange* of psychoanalytic psychotherapy, sex education, and social work, Young-Bruehl understands her role to be that of engendering empowerment through self-knowledge.

In my view, Young-Bruehl's focus is in fact most akin to a *practical psychoanalysis* (Renik 2006). That is, it is a specifically therapeutic venture, tailored to meet needs articulated by the patient, in collaboration with the analyst. She informs us, for example, that she worked with these young men on the difficulties that most clearly stood in the way of their survival. Developing collaborative relationships based on earned trust figured centrally, as did Young-Bruehl's willingness to occupy the divide that existed between herself and her patients. As Smith notes in his introduction, she also draws our attention to the gap distinguishing the young men themselves in their social positioning—as Hispanic and African American, as well as in the dynamics inhering in the particular degradations each had endured and perpetuated.

Yet Young-Bruehl's clinical exchanges also demonstrate how standard-issue concepts—the psychodynamics of humiliation and

powerlessness, and the operations of ego defenses (specifically, identification with the aggressor)—offered each young man a vocabulary for emotional experiencing, needed information about sexuality and the way relationships work, and, importantly, reasons and incentives to interrupt automatic expressions of violence and self-abnegation.

Both of these treatments were truncated when the drop-in center's funding was cut. But when, six month later, Ricardo telephoned Young-Bruehl in the hope of a "refreshing course"—playfully announcing himself with the words, "Elisabeth, it's your aggressor"—we know that psychoanalysis has acquired street credibility. In the process of this acquisition, we receive something not so far from a gift. Psychoanalytic psychotherapy looks *new* in our eyes, as surely it did for Freud and Breuer when they first ventured to treat hysterics, the outcasts of their day—just as must have been the case when Anna Freud opened the doors to Hampstead.

In his foreword to Bailly's (2002) book *Defining Edges: A New Look at Picture Frames*, Adam Gopnik notes that the frame placed around a work serves as a comment on the play of forces within it. Taken together, the articles in this issue go the distance in facilitating our appreciation of the claim that Milvertha Hendricks definitively makes on all of us. The extraordinary range of their contributions may also help us to understand, and also to bear, why it is that she does not return our gaze. As these contributions make clear, what is urgently important is what we do next.

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