

SELF EXAMINATION IN PSYCHOANALYSIS & PSYCHOTHERAPY COUNTERTRANSFERENCE & SUBJECTIVITY IN CLINICAL PRACTICE

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Book Notes
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Chapter 5 – Finding A Mind Of One’s Own

Bill’s client could not hold in her own mind her experience of genuine disinterest in having a life partner. It would quickly turn into have a sense of some sort of character deficit instead.

She could not inhabit and explore in her mind the experience and possible meanings of her inclinations to live a solitary life.

Bill did not perceive something to be wrong with her solitary nature, but he initially kept his opinion about this to himself.

She kept coming up against an internal ‘pressure to be normal’, which to her meant to commit herself to one man for the rest of her life. To her, this would be healthy, and in her own mind, she could not resolve this issue.

Bill became increasingly convinced that her position was not defensive nor pathological, but rather an indication of a life-long preference for relatively solitary activities and satisfactions.

Bill’s position with her was rather startling and disturbing for her to consider. But it also began to create a space of some quiet relief and a space to think somewhat differently.

This detour through his mind, his fantasies, and his associations afforded his client a space within which she could begin to recognize, and perhaps begin to accept, these aspects of her life and experience that she found to be so troubling.

Whatever his client comes to decide about her life, what is most essential is that she have the freedom of mind to make a decision in which she has come to know, understand, and respect her own mind more fully.



- *A successful therapy moves beyond any problem solving to a process of helping a person have a different relationship to their own mind.*
- *Psychotherapy fosters a particular kind of thinking - the capacity to observe and reflect on how one thinks.*

Our thoughts can be seen as ideas requiring no further thinking. Thinking about thinking involves a freedom to think from multiple perspectives.

The word *thinking* includes processes of knowing and learning that go far beyond ordinary cognition and rationality. During the experience of *thinking* in its fullest, our minds are open to, and informed by, our emotions, fantasies, body sensations, and shifts between conscious and unconscious realms.

- *Often, the opening to deeper, freer thinking comes through the encounter one has with the 'otherness' of another's mind.*

There is a certain, fascinating paradox that in order to find and keep one's own mind and its full capacities to think, we often need the engagement of the minds of others.

"The essence of the situation at the heart of the therapeutic exchange is to accomplish the return to oneself by means of the detour via the other." - Andre Green

Over the course of life we often find ourselves in situations where what we have known, and how we have known to think, does not keep up with the demands of a life well lived.

We hit points of anxiety or impasse when our thinking fails, so in therapy we can borrow and lean upon the mind of the therapist. It takes time for the therapeutic couple to learn how to think productively with each other.



The willingness to call one's self into question is essential; it opens the door to then beginning to think about one's thoughts.

- One of the essential goals of psychotherapy is to assist our clients to develop the capacity to think about their thinking. Over time, this process of using the interested and different mind of another person to reflect upon our thinking becomes internalized as a process we can do for ourselves.

Sometimes, in our role as therapist, we can find it difficult to position ourselves outside of our client's relentlessly anxious stories. We can lose track of what brought them in for therapy in the first place – and then we are not talking about what is most important to be addressing.

The benefit of being in the supervision role is that of being free of the immediate forces of the unconscious transference pressures and fantasies of both client and therapist.

Here is an example of the supervisor speaking to the therapist, as if they were the client:

“You fill the room and our time together with all the people who are creating trouble in your life. I get lost in the stories of these people and situations. I know they trouble you, but I don’t think they are the real trouble.

I think the real trouble is that you are in trouble with yourself. It is that your mind is forever filled with thoughts of other people. You are not in your own mind. It’s as though your mind doesn’t know how to think about itself. I find myself wondering what it is that you are afraid of or ashamed to let me know about you, maybe even to let yourself know.”

The supervisor’s primary intent in speaking this way is to literally lend his mind to the therapist through thinking out loud freely, associatively, so as to not only offer the therapist statements in which he might recognize what had been happening with his client, but also to stimulate his own freedom of mind.

The supervisor’s words flow out of a bodily and imaginative space within, and not from a cognitive or theoretic frame of reference.

The impasse in the therapy was not simply a result of the client’s defenses, but some that was being unconsciously created and lived between the client and the therapist.



To begin to be able to think and feel in relation to one’s habitual patterns of thinking, opens a containing space for deeply disturbing and enlivening states of affect.

- *A crucial aspect of being able to think about one’s thinking is the capacity to link one thought to another, to link one experience to another, to link conscious thought to unconscious wishes and fantasies.*

A refusal to think in these ways constitutes an ‘attack on linking’.

True thinking is not a cognitive and rational process. It has to do with the capacity to be deeply open to one’s affective and irrational realms of one’s inner life.

- *Thinking has the capacity to tolerate and link deep levels of mind and body.*

Thinking is fundamentally experiential, and it involves a capacity that is not simply intellectual, but in the lived encounter that is deeply emotional.

Early childhood wounding example:

A man's struggle to recover his own mind and feelings from the traumatic impact of his mother's dissociated intellect. This is not a conscious refusal to think. There had been an unconscious inability to think (and *link*) in the face of this pervasive early life stressor.

His mother used her intellect to sever any connection between her mind and the events of her family's history, between her mind and any felt history of her own tragic losses, and any capacity to understand her son. This is an example of an 'attack on linking'.

Consequently, this man could not make any links in the presence of his mother's way of being.

Bill began to lend this client his mind, as part of the therapy.