

Since the election of Donald Trump last November, the political world has jumped ever more prominently into our consulting rooms and our lives. As a Section we had already been moving into this realm in light of our advocacy direction regarding evidence based practice, practice guidelines, APA approval processes and so on, all of which have been very harmful to psychoanalysis. Moreover these developments have been destructive to our patients and the American public as they all result in decreasing both the amount (largely short term therapy) and type (CBT, drugs) of mental health services available.

We have offered panels at the last two Division 39 Spring Meetings addressing current political issues and published pieces in the Round Robin as part of our efforts to address these critical issues and will be carry on doing so. We will continue to keep you abreast of current developments at local and national levels that offer important possibilities for us both individually and collectively as a section to become involved with advocacy and political action.

In this spirit I want to introduce our new Round Robin, which will be sent out electronically about six times a year. Thus, we will be able to be more timely and comprehensive with our coverage. Our new editor, Dee Polyak, brings a wealth of experience and expertise as a newsletter editor. We want to thank our retiring editor, Richard Grose, for producing a newsletter of the highest quality over the last five years. Fonya Helm has done an outstanding job in upgrading and expanding the scope of our website. David Downing, our president elect, has a strong commitment toward addressing professional/political issues. Greg Novie has taken charge of our new advocacy committee.

Getting back to the issue of advocacy, we presented our program at the 2017 Division 39 Spring meeting on “Activism By and For Psychoanalysis: Past Present and Future”. Part of this panel was devoted to a discussion of our testimony at

hearings held by the Department of Education (which reviews and accredits professional associations) last June regarding the direction of the APA Committee on Accreditation toward approving programs dominated by a CBT orientation (now about 80%). We argued that APA is creating a CBT monopoly, which deprives the public from access to a broad range of therapeutic treatments. This effort is ongoing and we will persist in our efforts to advocate for greater inclusion of psychoanalysis in training programs and internships.

In this regard, an important new organization has been formed, the Psychotherapy Action Network (<https://psian.org>). This organization evolved out of the conference in Chicago in January of 2017, “Advancing Psychotherapy for the Next Generation: Rehumanizing Mental Health in Policy and Practice”, sponsored by the Chicago Center for Psychoanalysis. Members of our Section presented and participated at the conference and are involved with the organization. The overarching mission of PsiAN is to preserve and enhance psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, which we hope will begin a new era of activism on behalf of our profession and the public.

Another important development involves the Kedzie Center in Chicago, which provides treatment for underserved populations and is psychodynamically oriented. The Center was established by a referendum in the community allowing for tax revenue to fund its operations. Getting the referendum passed and navigating the legislative process was a model of collaboration between a committed and courageous group of citizens in the community and psychodynamically oriented professionals. Recently a similar referendum was passed in Chicago in a second community.

Psychoanalysis and the Analysis of the American Mind and System

Returning now to the ever-present reality of Donald Trump infiltrating our lives, I want to address the possibilities this offers if not requires of us. As I talk to people, read list serves and the mainstream media, an overarching reaction is along the

lines of how could it happen that this “evil” and/or “sick” man could become President? The implication is that this is some sort of American anomaly and that getting rid of Trump will return us to something like the “good old days.”

This attitude calls to mind Claude Rains (Louis, the Police Chief) in “Casablanca” who says with major ‘tongue in cheek’ to Humphrey Bogart (Rick the Café owner), “ I’m shocked...there’s gambling going on here!” Of course there was lots of gambling going on just as there have been lots of evil and/or sick things that have happened in the United States prior to Donald Trump. To name a few, we can cite the genocide of 10 million Indians, the countless millions of Blacks killed and enslaved, the endless imperial wars (the US throughout its history has almost never not been at war), the ever increasing economic inequality escalating over the last forty years of neoliberalism, the appalling health care of citizens that is by far the worst in the first world and in some cases worse than some third world countries, and so on.

More recently during the Obama administration we have the failure to prosecute the banks and bankers after 2008, the deportation of more immigrants than ever before, the prosecution of more whistleblowers than ever before, the use of more drones than ever before, and of course significantly increasing economic inequality, and so on. We can add here the escalating level of mass gun violence being turned inward by Americans on the American people that has now entered the Trump era.

Moreover, we must consider the Republican Party beyond Trump as it attempted to “repeal and replace” Obamacare. Their effort to impose changes to the health care system would have resulted in more than twenty million Americans losing insurance. This would lead to people dying, perhaps thousands as 45,000 deaths per year have been linked to lack of coverage. To even attempt this is monstrous if not murderous. The underlying reason for proposing these cuts is to provide major tax breaks for the wealthy whose money is behind the elections of those in power. This is a profound testament to the perilous state of our democracy and our country.

To bring the issue close to home, imagine we were seeing a patient who talked about working for a bad boss (whether sick, evil or whatever). The patient expressed the belief that having a new boss would basically fix his/her problems. Surely we would be fundamentally skeptical of this belief and, of course, mindful of deeper issues.

The public mood can understandably be characterized by the immortal words of Howard Beale of "Network" - "Mad as hell and not going to take it anymore". This is not just reflective of Trump voters but Sanders supporters as well. If we add both we could say that more two thirds of the electorate feels this way. To be sure Trump appeals to some of our basest instincts. This is terribly destructive to many and to the body politic as a whole. He also appeals to a lot of people who are legitimately "mad as hell" and as documentary filmmaker Michael Moore says, love Trump's brazenness as in "that took balls" to say even if they don't agree with what he says. Or as historian of psychoanalysis, Eli Zaretsky puts it, people respond to his "id" (emotionally charged) talk versus the "superego" (inhibitory) talk of most politicians. Perhaps we can take lessons from this in terms of speaking out more directly and forcefully.

But there is another issue here. What do we say? Or perhaps more importantly from what perspective do we speak? We sometimes see on our list serves the idea that we ought find some "psychoanalytic" point of view from which to approach the subject. What does this mean? Do we just graft analytic concepts onto Donald Trump or world events more thoroughly? Is it enough to diagnose Trump or say that he is saturating and penetrating us with projective identifications? This approach may give us some small comfort, as we may feel we understand and thereby have some sense of control over what is going on, but does it further our work with patients or accomplish much in the public's mind?

I believe we now have a great opportunity to grow as a field, to become more clinically and socially relevant and address the increasing marginalization of psychoanalysis. If we consider that the essentials of psychoanalysis are the potency of unconscious process and influence, the critical importance of history and development, all taken with an ethic that values authenticity, freedom and subjectivity, we have a basis upon which to expand our theory and practice both in and out of our offices. In order to move in this direction we must take the system of societal organization more into account, namely capitalism and the neoliberal version of it over the last 40 years that not surprisingly coincides with the decline in the influence and credibility of our field. Simply put, the overarching values of our current system - consumerism, commodification and the domination of profit over human need are in opposition to the essence of our own.

Problematically we have been complicit to some extent in our theorizing and practice in relation to the system. To illustrate, Philip Cushman (1995) speaks of the “war” between Melanie Klein and Harry Stack Sullivan during the 1940’s wherein the province of psychoanalysis was further defined. For Klein the emphasis on inherent structures and motivations dominated, whereas for Sullivan the influence of the social and political took on far greater import. This is not meant to diminish the clinical value of Klein’s work. Rather this speaks to the political forces both internal and external to psychoanalysis contributing to her triumph and the “road not traveled” as Cushman puts it, and “to consider history and politics as appropriate subjects of study, to conduct research on the moral messages within theories. Sullivan, albeit haltingly, walked down this road ...For Klein the possibility never existed.”

For Cushman, Klein’s success had to do with the domination of consumption and commodification in the economic and political system that corresponded to the taking in of the breast however good or bad. We might also consider how our theories contributed to the past hegemony of psychoanalysis in the mental health world in that we became the ‘experts’ in this internal realm. This provided us with a

privileged position professionally over clinical matters, which had clear economic implications.

Furthermore, the origins of psychoanalysis can be seen in the framework of political and historical developments. In a recent paper presented at our Activism Panel (2017), I discuss the emergence of psychoanalysis in the context of the industrial revolution along with social work, labor unions and so on, all of which served as counterforces to the alienation and social fragmentation brought about via the systemic economic imperatives toward profit above all else. What I am arguing here is that psychoanalytic values are more compatible with a 'socialist' vision of life. This is of course what many of the founders (Fromm, Fenichel, Reich, Jacobson and others of the Frankfurt School) of our field believed. Moreover, there was an understanding that we cannot divorce ourselves from the political world and the economic system in which we are embedded.

We now have the opportunity to address the rise in protest and outrage over the economic inequality and social injustice crystallized in the Donald Trump era. In taking a psychoanalytic stance, being mindful of unconscious influence and the avoidance of awareness, we might turn our attention to broader group/social forces. Just as we do with our patients, we might examine more critically how and why as Americans we often act against our own self-interest.

One example of this involves how we deny or disavow the earlier mentioned darker side of our history and current politics. I believe the illusion of American Exceptionalism (which we might call a 'cultural grandiosity' as in "Make America Great Again") serves to keep us from more analytically addressing the harmful aspects of our current system. Of course, there are countless other approaches that can enhance and deepen our understanding of the context in which we practice.

Analyzing how the past is affecting the present is of course what we would do with our patients. Engaging this and related issues in the public sphere, and in the

context of the current political and economic system, moves us toward greater relevance in our society and away from the what we could call a 'psychoanalytic isolationism' that has characterized our field for decades and contributed mightily to our marginalization.

If we act as if having a new president will return us to the "good old days", we miss the opportunity to expand our theory and practice to include the political and historical. We need to make the social world a more integral part of the psychoanalytic enterprise. After all, we hear about current events ever more prominently in our work with patients. So, it is incumbent upon us to have a more inclusive understanding of other ways of organizing society, based fundamentally on human need and social and economic justice.

Analyzing the influences of our societal system on us, just as we do with family systems, would expand the breadth and depth of psychoanalytic theory and practice, making our work more useful and relevant to more of us. There were other economic/political systems before capitalism/neoliberalism and surely there will be more to follow. In this way we become a part of the change process toward a social fabric based upon the humanistic values that are at the heart of psychoanalysis and which we share with the vast majority of our fellow citizens.