

viewpoints

in
psychoanalysis

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Viewpoints is a forum for
sharing, debating, and
analyzing the historical,
academic, political, and
experimental aspects of the
psychoanalytic experience.

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at sparking discussion and
reflection. It is committed to
representing a diversity of
perspectives, along various
dimensions.

A Note from the Editor

Neil Wilson PhD

Michael Isaacs moved some years ago to California. We were very good friends and kept in touch. We still do. Mike is a lawyer who became a psychoanalyst. Quite unusual. Joe Van Winkle is from another field. He also teaches Tai Chi and excels in that field.

This is my final turn as editor of *Viewpoints*. Len Strahl was the first editor and edited until his passing many years ago. Wilda Mesias will be our next editor. It will be in good hands.

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Articles

Fear of Death Anxiety

Michael S. Isaacs, LCSW

Note: This article first appeared in the Association of Spirituality and Psychotherapy's 2014 summer issue.

I believe that the fear of death is not the underlying source of all anxiety, but it is the underlying source of some anxiety. Let me add that fear of death is a greater source of anxiety than most of us realize.

Some people just do not have fear of death as their core anxiety. Their predominant anxiety might be loss of livelihood or money; deep guilt over what has been thought, said, or done in their lives; existential loss of purpose and meaning in life; lack of love and connection; grief over the loss of loved ones; and failure or fear of failure.

Here is an example where the fear of death may have been partially a source of anxiety. Dan was a male teenager who was bullied unmercifully and threatened with serious physical harm in high school because he was gay. He became extremely anxious coming to school daily. Since he had not come out of the closet he felt alone. He became depressed and eventually committed suicide. It is doubtful that fear of death was a major cause of anxiety. However, we might speculate that his high level of anxiety about being hurt and attacked included an unconscious fear of death.

Why does fear of death cause anxiety ranging from very high, moderate, and light? Why are thoughts of death so fearful that they are often denied and repressed into our unconscious mind?

We are anxious because we are understandably facing loss of what we hold so dear. We only know the human life that we know. There will be inevitable loss of home, family, possessions, and health. The future is uncertain and unknowable. Death is beyond our control and understanding. As the well-known psychotherapist Erich Fromm wrote: "Man is the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem which he has to solve."

Especially when we age, we look around and see those that are involved in chronic pain, who have life threatening diseases, who suffer, who decay, and die. We ourselves may be currently involved in such anxiety conditions. In both cases we are prone to be anxious about our mortality. We worry about when we will die and what disease or condition will "do us in." We feel helpless. Sometimes even our minor illnesses are feared. For, if they became worse, it might mark the beginning of our death path.

When my father started his '60s he joked that every day when he woke up he would read the newspaper obituary column in bed. If he wasn't on the list, he relaxed and got out of bed to start his day!

There are other dimensions of death fear and the anxiety it evokes. That is, what happens close to or immediately before the actual time of death? Will there be trepidation, loss of control, or panic? Losing our human identity into the unknown is a first time experience.

The last dimension of death fear and anxiety is a big one. What happens after death? Who knows? That's the anxiety! However, materialists, agnostics, and atheists that I know don't seem to care that much about death. They didn't know why they were born. They are here on earth and they don't seem to care about what happens after death. Maybe they are in a state of denial. Or maybe, they're right!

No prior death anxiety was illustrated to me by my consultation with a well know teacher of Chinese Medicine, Doctor Nan Lu. He told me he has no anxiety about death because the day of death is already ordained for everyone. There is no use worrying at all. Go about your business and don't be afraid of death. Don't be anxious.

An example of no fear of after-death comes to mind. A much older friend of mine died at 104 years of age. Let's call her Joan. After she turned 100, she wanted desperately to die. All her friends had died and she had no relatives. She missed her recently deceased younger beloved brother every day. She wanted to be with him in the grave site right next to him. She was relatively in good health. She did not want to do anything to end her life by giving up or by her own hand because she felt that her death should evolve whenever death happened naturally. Joan not only had no fears about an afterlife, but actually yearned for it.

Some religious adherents are assured that by leading a pure religious life they will go to heaven and not hell. No fear. Some devout Hindus believe that if their bodies are burned on the banks of the Ganges River in India their souls will escape the constant cycle of rebirth and attain Mosha, or Salvation.

Do we believe that the likes of Buddha, Jesus, Lao-Tzu, and Ramakrishna, after illumination, were anxious or fearful of death? I doubt it, and if so, very little concern. Buddha started a whole religion when as a young man he first saw on the streets of India, the suffering of a sick man, a dying man, and a dead man. Most of us are not illumined, but by pursuing our spiritual paths, we can make strides to gradually reach higher levels of consciousness. There is hope thereby, to reduce the anxiety over fear of death and by grace, have a glimpse of immortality and eternity.

The comedian, writer, and movie actor-director Woody Allen has a lot to say in his works and interviews about his many anxieties and fears about death. He does this through his humor. He covers all the areas of lifetime fear, act of dying, and after-death anxieties.

In one of his films he has a headache. He is frozen with fear that he has a deadly tumor. A panic attack sets in and he runs to a hospital for a scan. Three of his quips in his standup comedy and movies are known to many Allen fans because he makes fun of death anxiety fears. One is that he is not afraid of death- he just doesn't want to be there when it happens. Next is that he is not sure if there is life after death but just in case there is, he will bring a clean set of underwear. Lastly, is that he doesn't want to achieve immortality by his work, but that he wants to achieve immortality by not dying.

Allen, in a fairly recent television interview, explained why he keeps so busy. As a workaholic he

crams in directing a movie each year, plays the clarinet in a band regularly, and writes essays frequently. As a young adult he realized how much suffering there was in getting older and facing the decline of the mind. He freaked out when he realized the inevitability and reality of death. He made up his mind to keep extremely busy in his career to ward off depression.

Actually, Allen's comments show how anxiety and fear of death can have a positive function. Awareness of mortality can motivate us to give more priority to such changes as improving family relations, writing that book, and having more joy in life.

How can Psychospiritual therapists help clients deal with anxiety that is caused by fear of death? The key is awareness of this fear. During my Psychoanalytical training I was taught that the two subjects that clients were most afraid to talk about were sex and money. Now I realize that death should be added to the list! There is resistance to talking about death because most of us cling to the idea that we will never die. The unconscious defense of denial comes into play. Besides, it is not a pleasant subject to talk about. This taboo is why many keep delaying executing or updating a will! Therefore, we should not expect the client to open up about the subject until ready. Maybe dream material will come up to reveal death fears that might lead to curiosity and memories.

Death concern and anxiety arise more with age. Obviously older clients have more physical and mental challenges. Also, the subject is more likely to be relevant for clients of all ages if they have had traumatic experiences involving serious illness of self or others, life threatening incident from abuse or accident, and other body invasions.

Psychospiritual therapists, like all therapists, should encourage clients to talk about their anxieties and fears about death and dying. We can assure them that their concerns and fears are prevalent and normal.

We can also ask clients to see if they can think of any cognitive, positive thoughts which would allay their anxieties to a degree. These examples are highly personal and may be rationalizations. They may not substantially reduce death anxieties but they may be comforting nevertheless:

"Do I remember anything before I was born? No. So the same will happen to me after death. It will just be a nothing, like a peaceful forever sleep."; "If no one died there would be no room on the planet for everyone and the world would become extinct. I've had my human life chance to live. In due time I will be glad to turn over the baton for someone else."; "Dying can be a relief if I am in incurable mental and physical anguish."; Death can have the advantage of me predeceasing my wife and my children so I can avoid the anguish of seeing them die."; I won't have to endure the pain of observing continual acts of man's cruelty to man, including but not limited to violence such as murder, war, and hatred."; And lastly, on a lighter vein, "I can avoid the effects of global warming."

In my own early psychoanalysis my analyst commented that I had anxiety about death. I vehemently insisted he was wrong. I said I was not afraid of death, but admitted I was afraid of life! As the years have gone by though, I have realized that I do have body fears that wouldn't worry me so much if I had no death anxiety.

As Psychospiritual therapists we can help and encourage clients to explore death concerns. I refer to such fields as religion, MY PRACTICE, and poetry. They often embody guidance, solace, and understanding. Psychotherapy has been around for relatively few years, but coming to grips with death issues has been around for thousands of years. For example, the Twenty Third Psalm has given countless people down through Centuries assurance that they are not alone in the death

experience. Furthermore, that we can have faith that dying will be peaceful.

The spiritual attribute of forgiveness can also be discussed with clients before death if the client is open to bringing up the subject. If forgiveness can be implemented before death this can bring peace of mind and closure to both the one dying and the one being forgiven.



The Death of Socrates (1787)
Jacques-Louis David
Oil on canvas
Metropolitan Museum of Art
New York, NY

One Hundred Years of the Uncanny

Wilda Mesias PhD



The Lovers (1928)
René Magritte
Oil on canvas
Museum of Modern Art

In 2019, in celebration of the century that has passed since Freud (1919) wrote his paper “The Uncanny” (*Das Unheimliche*), the Freud Museum in London held the exhibition “The Uncanny: A Centenary.”

As one watches the forty-two seconds of the exhibition trailer, suspenseful music plays, and images of doppelgängers, ominous stairs, grotesque statues, and humanoid robots are displayed. The following words appear: *horror, repulsion, animated objects, the double, ghosts and spirits, castration complex, return of the repressed, fear of death*. Then this statement comes into view:

Some people are more susceptible to the effects of the uncanny but everyone has experienced it at one time or another. Have you?

This exhibition took place between October 30, 2019 and February 9, 2020, ending just as the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning to cast its shadow.

By the time Freud had written his 1919 paper, the Spanish flu was on its way to infecting nearly a third of the world population in what became known as the influenza pandemic (February 1918 to April 1920). Freud lost his twenty six year old daughter Sophie to that pandemic.

In reference to this loss, he writes to his friend Pastor Oskar Pfister on January 27, 1920:

That afternoon we received the news that our sweet Sophie in Hamburg had been snatched away by influenzal pneumonia, snatched away in the midst of glowing health, from a full and

active life as a competent mother and loving wife, all in four or five days, as though she had never existed. (Letters of Sigmund Freud 1873-1939 (ed. Ernst L. Freud), 327)

And to Sándor Ferenczi on February 4, 1920:

Dear friend,

Don't worry about me. I am the same except for somewhat more fatigue. The death, as painful as it is, does not overturn any attitude toward life. For years I was prepared for the loss of my sons, now comes that of my daughter. Since I am profoundly unbelieving, I have no one to blame, and I know there is no place where one can lodge a complaint. The "eternally uniformly set clock of duty" and the "sweet habit of being" will do the rest, in order to let everything continue on an even keel. Very deep within I perceive the feeling of a deep, insurmountable narcissistic insult. (The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi [hereinafter Freud-Ferenczi], Volume 3, 1920-1933, 6-7)

Freud's loss is couched in the language of the familiar, the expected, the regimented ("I was prepared," "clock of duty," "habit of being," "even keel"). And yet beneath this language is an experience that reveals just the opposite: the unforeseeable "insult" of a radiant daughter reduced to memories "as though she had never existed." Resilience and yearning are both in tension and in harmony.

Viewed in this light, Freud's explorations in *The Uncanny* take on a particularly powerful resonance. In that work, Freud sees the phenomenon of the uncanny as something belonging to the realm of the frightening, invoking fear and dread. In his effort to define it, Freud—ever the scholar—investigates the term's genealogy in a host of languages, producing pages of etymological investigation and inferring that many languages lack a term for this specific feeling. In a passage of particular relevance here, he notes that, in German, uncanny (*unheimlich*; "unhomely") contains its opposite (*heimlich*; "homely"), highlighting the strange in the ordinary, discomfort in comfort.

Freud writes:

For this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. This reference to the factor of repression enables us, furthermore, to understand Schelling's definition of the uncanny as something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to life. (Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (ed., trans., James Strachey) [hereinafter SE], Volume XVII, 241)

He then elaborates:

Concerning the factors of silence, solitude, and darkness, we can only say that they are actually elements in the production of that infantile morbid anxiety from which a majority of human beings have never become quite free. (SE XVII, 252)

Lacan likewise speaks of the uncanny (*étrange, inquietant, lugubre*) in his Seminar X: Anxiety (*L'angoisse*). He situates the uncanny in his theory of anxiety at the minus phi ($-\Phi$), at the place of castration, loss of phallus (symbolic and imaginary), and lack. In this schema, the uncanny connotes feelings of unbearable anxiety.

The same phenomenon is also embedded in Julia Kristeva's idea of the the abject. The abject is the horror in response to the threatened dissolution of the border delimiting the interior and the exterior of the body—between purity and defilement, subject and object, self and other. She locates the abject in crimes, corpses, and bodily fluids that are conceived as transgressions (*The Powers of Horror* (1982)).

Freud and Lacan's explorations take us to that hidden, haunting space where the uncanny—the strange/stranger (*étrange/étranger*)—lives. For Kristeva, it is the sociopolitical effects of being estranged that are the most palpable.

Over the past year our global society has faced something for which we were *not* prepared, despite the fact that pandemics and plagues have been part of our history. The virus has brought us dread, fear of death, unbearable anxiety, isolation, and darkness. It has forced us to question whether we are safe. We have felt discomfort amid the familiar. It has ruptured the line between imagination and reality. *Contagion* is no longer only a movie; it's the reality we live in. The virus is something we wish would have remained hidden, repressed, unfamiliar. Submerged feelings of anguish, helplessness, anger, and rage have returned as the changes we have experienced over the past year challenge and unravel the stability of our repressive structures.

It's not difficult to see how images of untold corpses awaiting burial during the first wave of the pandemic brought the question of our own mortality too close for comfort—Kristeva's subject and object blurring. The reality of what nature can produce subverts our quotidian belief that our trauma is safely tucked away. And, with our defenses lowered, repressed libidinal impulses return in raw or in derivative form.

We now are living with an uncanny natural force, a virus that has made us face our primal fear of death, that has challenged our primary narcissism, and that has paralyzed society as we used to know it. Infrastructures—physical, financial, emotional—have collapsed, health systems have buckled under overwhelming pressure, inequalities have been impossible to deny. We have seen anguished calls for social justice, as income disparities have worsened and political divisions have brought us near the point of self-destruction. We have learned to function in a virtual world, our lives at times resembling a science-fiction movie. We self-isolate, we socially distance ourselves, we disinfect to preserve the limits between ourselves and the outside. To describe the experience as surreal (*sur*; “above, beyond”) is entirely accurate: we are living on the other side of the familiar.

In light of the insights our own experience yields, it's perhaps not surprising that Freud composed *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (*Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, 1920) soon after *The Uncanny*. With the War coming to its conclusion and the influenza pandemic raging, Freud seems to have had beauty and horror—life and destruction—on his mind. Indeed, Freud ties together the two works, along with his own experience in writing them, in a letter to Sándor Ferenczi dated May 12, 1919:

Dear friend,

I hear that a letter will arrive now and then, and so I am writing you on the off chance; for a long time I have been unable to keep up with what I have already told you. The ban is very bad; aside from the euphoric telephone reports that Rank is getting from the Journal, I have nothing from any of you and am totally at the mercy of my fantasy. I read something out of your last lines about Toni which I already had in mind at the beginning of this supposed

relapse and which was since confirmed in a letter from Lajos of April 20, which arrived late. So I don't know how things have been going since, and since my own complaints, about which I wrote to you, are constantly increasing, I am figuring on not seeing him again. With this news on the 6th of the month, an inhibition in my up to then increased productivity set in. I had not only completed the draft of "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," which is being copied out for you, but I also took up the little thing about the "uncanny" again, and, with a simple-minded idea [*Einfall*], I attempted a $\Psi\alpha$ foundation for group psychology. (Freud-Ferenczi, Volume 2, 1914-1919, 354-355)

The two works, written in tandem, work in tandem. The return of (or to) the repressed, embedded in the nature of the uncanny, also forms the basis for the framework Freud sets out in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. As Freud writes in *The Uncanny*:

For it is possible to recognize the dominance in the unconscious mind of a 'compulsion to repeat' proceeding from the instinctual impulses and probably inherent in the very nature of the instincts—a compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle, lending to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character, and still very clearly expressed in the impulses of small children; a compulsion, too, which is responsible for a part of the course taken by the analyses of neurotic patients. All these considerations prepare us for the discovery that whatever reminds us of this inner 'compulsion to repeat' is perceived as uncanny. (SE, Volume XVII, 238)

Taking up this inexorable compulsion to repeat in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud examines the interplay between Eros (life instinct) and Thanatos (death instinct). While Eros's aim is self-preservation and the nurturance of life, Thanatos manifests itself in our aggressive, destructive impulses, in our shared violent nature, in—ultimately—a return to the inorganic. Indeed, as he puts it, "then we shall be compelled to say that 'the aim of all life is death' and, looking backwards, that 'inanimate things existed before living ones.'" (SE, Volume XVIII, 38) These daemonic characters of the mind work in dualistic fashion; one can turn into the other.

A century ago, the world in which Freud was writing faced the influenza pandemic. We are now facing our own global tragedy. Living amid the uncanny, we are witnessing the vicissitudes of our instincts in response to collective trauma, just as, perhaps, Freud did.

As the Freud Museum's exhibition reminds us, *The Uncanny* is one of the countless Freud works that "went on to inspire art, film, literature and further psychoanalytic inquiry." Equally resonant, though, are the traces of Freud's lived experience that we can sense in this text.

In that vein, on the occasion of the exhibition, the Museum chose to display the couch on which Freud died (rarely seen). Beyond the visual metaphor of the couch, the Museum's choice is, perhaps, an invitation to imagine the scene: how, in Freud's last days, he continued to write despite his illness, saw a small number of patients, and enjoyed his garden. The palpable, quotidian details of these last moments fill the mind. From up close, we can sense this loss. It is a strangely familiar one.

To access the Freud Museum's exhibition:
<https://www.freud.org.uk/exhibitions/the-uncanny-a-centenary>

Aren't television, and more prominently, the Internet amazing teaching tools?

They have educated us to understand, on a universal level, reproduction methods of a majority of the animal kingdom (ourselves included) including birds, and many sea dwellers. And although the information is available to us, via these methodologies, some of the more fascinating aspects of fish reproduction is not what we would consider mainstream.

For example, when was the last time you saw a wildlife program that detailed the breeding habits of the Siamese Fighting Fish or Betta (*Betta splendens*)? Were you aware that you cannot keep two (or more) males of the species in the same bowl/tank? Hence the name! The interesting aspect of their breeding process is that the male builds a bubble nest i.e. he blows bubbles at the water's surface. They adhere together to form a nest. The female is kept separately until she is ripe/laden with eggs, and yes, females CAN be kept in multiples in the same environment! When introduced to the male, he will aggressively pursue her, if she accepts him, he wraps himself around her, squeezing the eggs out and into the bubble nest. He then fertilizes them. At this point, the female is removed for her safety and the male will tend the eggs to hatching.

A more visually amazing event is the breeding ceremony of African Cichlids. These fish originate in the Rift Lakes, Malawi, Tanganyika, Victoria. The majority of these fish are mouth brooders, that is to say that the female carries her eggs in the buccal cavity of her mouth! The gestation period of these fish is approximately three weeks. During this time, the female will not eat, although I have observed a female on occasion try to guide food into her mouth and over the eggs.

It begins when a dominant male of a specie transforms or, as we say in the hobby, "colors up" or "goes into color". What this refers to is that a male is in full breeding color, intense and vibrant in color. During this time, the fins of said male will turn jet black. The male "dances" for the female which is to say he displays himself, shaking with ferocity! He then tries to attract her to his anal area/anal fin. He has what are termed "egg spots" on his anal fin. These emulate, in color and generally size, the eggs a female will produce. The female, thinking she has eggs to collect, drives to the area and tries to retrieve the fake eggs. As she does, she releases HER eggs, the male quickly passes over, fertilizing them with his semen, and she scoops them up! The procedure can carry on for quite some time depending on the volume of eggs the female is carrying.

Other species are a little more conventional in spawning. South and Central American Cichlids pair off for life! They lay their eggs on a flat, smooth substrate, a smooth rock, etc. They are excellent parents and both will be involved with maintaining the eggs and fry upon hatching. You may not believe it, but Angelfish are part of this genus of fish, as are Discus.

More common tropical fishes, such your live bearers do just that! They give birth to live fish! This group includes guppies, platies, sword tails, mollies. In this class of fish, the male has an ovipositor, or tube, which he inserts into the female to impregnate her. As the female grows closer to releasing her fry, the area around her anal fin (her belly) will begin to grow in size and become dark as the eggs incubate. She will then release when they are developed. It is believed that a female can have potentially three spawns from one impregnation.

I know we have centered mainly on fresh water fish, but these are examples of fish that are not the most commonly discussed or presented on television.

I hope this was an informative little blurb on the hobby I so enjoy!



The Triumph of Surrealism (1937)

Max Ernst

Oil on canvas

Private collection

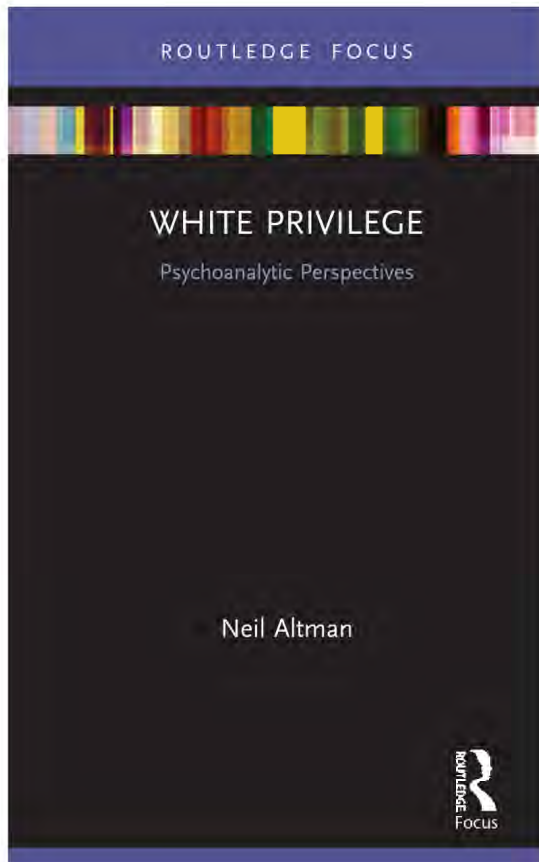
Book Reviews

Neil Altman's *White Privilege: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*

Tammy Smith LCSW (NJI Second-Year Candidate)

The traumatizing image of a White police officer kneeling on a Black man's neck has triggered many of us to explore institutional and structural racism in unprecedented ways. With their advanced training in exploring the unconscious's impact on feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, psychoanalysts are ideal trailblazers to advocate for racial reform. Skilled clinicians practicing psychodynamic

therapy expose how problems live within to understand and transcend larger social issues.



Since the tragic death of George Floyd, I have become more vigilant in addressing and unpacking my implicit biases. I began reading more earnestly about systemic injustices and the impact of police brutality and healthcare disparities on communities of color. I joined several discussion groups and leaned into the discomfort of feeling awkward talking about race. Becoming aware of my white privilege and how I unknowingly perpetuated social injustices that undermine the advancement of people of color generated feelings of guilt and shame I had difficulty processing.

To conquer the insecurities I had begun experiencing in the consulting room providing therapy to my small caseload of Black patients, I started searching online for articles about how White therapists can work more effectively with persons of color. Stumbling across Neil Altman's recently published book, *White Privilege: Psychoanalytic Perspectives*, seemed uncannily prophetic. I may risk sounding corny, but this groundbreaking text has transformed how I see, work, and talk about race.

For therapists not already familiar with complex issues about race, Altman's work is perhaps best used in conjunction with "The Next Jim Crow" by Michelle Alexander, "So You Want to Talk about Race" by Ijeoma Oluo, or "White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism" by Robin DiAngelo.

Altman effectively uses both classical and relational paradigms to illustrate how psychoanalysis can inform how we begin to unpack our personal and collective perspectives of power, privilege, and race.

He makes terrific use of Melanie Klein's notions of depressive and paranoid-schizoid positions to demonstrate how political views become artificially polarized as a way to sway public opinion and generate votes. Altman also explains how "splitting" and other defensive mechanisms such as projection identification permit the disavowal and dehumanization of others, leading to the type of stereotypical thinking that often precedes either overt or covert discriminatory behaviors. Since psychoanalytic work more traditionally occurs on an individual level between therapist and patient, Altman emphasizes the benefits of conceptualizing psychoanalysis as a field theory to extend many of its core concepts to the social world. He draws references to Sullivan's notion of the therapist as a participant-observer, Bion's use of anxiety to explore group functioning, and Winnicott's facilitating environment as relevant examples. However, Altman always wisely cautions analysts to remain prudent when applying traditionally intrapsychic concepts to an interpersonal context.

Mental health practitioners, irrespective of their diverse theoretical orientations, should be encouraged to embrace consciousness-raising as a way to become more informed to serve underrepresented population groups better. For me, the most beneficial aspect of Altman's book was how Kleinian thought helps clarify the challenges community advocates have in facilitating productive conversations about social change. Although the passion one needs to generate transformative change happens from the paranoid-schizoid position, and the respectful listening supporting such change occurs during the depressive position, such positions are far from fixed, and folks will naturally move in and out of both as they confront their defenses and engage in this deep kind of healing work.

A Contemporary Psychoanalytic Approach to the Formation and Understanding of Dreams

Daphne Lin Chang MA, LPC, NCPsyA

Dr. Blechner opened the New Jersey Institute's 42nd Annual Conference by inviting the attendees to consider expanding treatment innovation via dream work in the consulting room. The presenter first gave a succinct introduction to contemporary dream interpretation. He acquainted the participants with a brief history from Freud's original dream interpretation to Montague Ullman's more recent psychoanalytic approach. He drew references from Chapter 6 of *The Interpretation of Dreams* and elaborated on the concepts of condensation and displacement, which comprise and construct a myriad of "rebuses" (referred to by Freud) during the dream's formation (see below: the rebus for "I understand").

Stand I

Dream rebuses, explained Dr. Blechner, are like personalized TAT (Thematic Apperception Test) images, where the patient and the analyst engage each other in interpretation of pictures created from the patient's unconscious and/or day residues. The manifest content becomes a means of communication between one's unconscious thoughts and preconscious mind. The presenter shared a present day research study by Tomoyasu Horikawa and Yukiyasu Kamitani in which the neuroscientists published their studies on decoding of dream imagery: utilizing fMRI, they provided scientific evidence of neural representation of visually evoked emotion. More traditionally, according to Jung, dream symbols offer subjective approaches to understanding dreams, and every character in the dream can represent different aspects of the patient. Within the transference, the dream can point to understanding of how the patient experiences the analyst.

The presenter reiterated the importance of exploring both the psychological meaning of classical psychoanalytic approaches as well as the overt meaning of the dream to the dreamer. He also underscored the significance of cultural and familial implications when we consider the multiple meanings of dream symbols. It was noted that the dialectic process in the consulting room facilitates the appreciation of such multimeanings and enriches the examination of dream work. Dr. Blechner gave an example of his clinical technique: he would ask the patient "Have you ever experienced what happened in the dream or something like it?". He would be curious to learn and observe if the patient exhibited similar behavior in and/or outside of the therapeutic sessions.

Dr. Blechner described the technique of guided association, where the therapist instructs the dreamer to create a headline after summarizing the dream. He cited amplification, a process

recommended by Jung, which enables the patient to use the manifest content further with a wider free associative implication. The presenter reviewed Eric Erikson's contribution to the modern understanding of dream work. Erikson seeks value in manifest content, instructing us to analyze four dimensions of the presented dream: 1) The people (present & absent), 2) The emotion, 3) The location, and 4) The time (future, present, past). Dr. Blechner emphasized that the dream is closer to the language of thoughts, and connects images with emotions. In other words, our thinking is an emotional pictogram. We were reminded to not underestimate the rich therapeutic merit in the manifest content of the dream. One of the conference attendees, zooming from home, virtually shared with the audience a footnote (added in 1925) from Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*:

They seek to find the essence of dreams in their latent content and in so doing they overlook the distinction between the latent dream-thoughts and the dream work. . . . dreams are nothing more than a particular form of thinking.

Intrinsic to dream interpretation, noted by Dr. Blechner, is the illumination of transference, countertransference, and counteranxiety. Dreams and their implications can serve as supervision when the therapist encourages a patient/therapist dialogue of continuous, reciprocal, interactive interpretation. This circular feedback process of dream clarification enhances the understanding of the dream meaning for the patient and analyst. It carries subtle and abundant messages when we study the dream formulation in the "here and now" interaction of the therapeutic dyad. In using dream as self-supervision and self-analysis, it is also important to remain aware of oneirophobia: "fear of " one's dream, where defensive resistance to understanding may be at work. Dr. Blechner commented that keeping logs of one's dream over time can elucidate one's unconscious and shed light on one's inner landscape.

After a short break, Dr. Burt Seidler delivered a dynamic explication of a succinct but evocative case presentation. The conference participants were intrigued by his case and spontaneously applied the dream work introduced by Dr. Blechner in the first part of the conference. The stimulating exchanges among the attendees and between presenters additionally demonstrated the profound value of Group Dream Work. The conference attendees engaged in the first three stages of group dream process as outlined by Dr. Blechner: 1) Narrative of the dream (Dr. Seidler's case presentation), 2) Free association of the attendees (imagining having the same dream as the case patient), 3) Dreamer (patient) remaining silent while the group free associates. The Dream Group Process undoes displacement, unpacks condensation, translates symbols, and decodes the rebus, as Dr. Blechner had depicted in his earlier presentation. The lively discussion that followed certainly validated the essence of the presentation -- there was abundance of material we could therapeutically gain by studying the manifest dream content. In conclusion, Dr. Blechner suggested that the dream is a medium that introduces something new about the patient. We do not always need to do an exhaustive dream analysis; it is good enough if the presented dream leads us to ask one good question.

The New Jersey Institute's 42nd Annual Conference was attended by close to 90 participants, including individuals from Austria and the United Kingdom via Zoom streaming on October 4th. Despite having to alter the traditional in-person event due to the pandemic, Dr. Blechner's Power Point slides helped participants stay focused, and sustained continuity of the presentation despite some internet instability. Above all, the engaging delivery of an exciting topic and a pertinent case resulted in an exceptionally fruitful Q & A and a stimulating discussion.