



D S P P B U L L E T I N
Dallas Society for Psychoanalytic Psychology
Exploring and promoting the psychoanalytic perspective

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PRESIDENT'S FAREWELL

As I write this "end of term" report, I find it difficult to believe that the year has already flown by. Like most worthwhile tasks, I approached being DSPP President with an equal amount of anticipation and dread. I was hoping to find inspiration, fellowship, commitment to excellence and camaraderie among my peers and fearing the additional workload on an already busy life. I am pleased to say that I found a great deal of the former and very little of the latter. To that end I owe many heartfelt thanks.

I know that this year would not have been half as enjoyable for me if I had not had Scott Nelson, PhD as Program Chair. Scott and the other members of the Program Committee, Dale Godby, PhD, Myrna Little, PhD, and Heather Robbins, PhD, worked extremely hard to make our innovative program year a success. As a committee we knew we were taking a risk in only reading the work of our Workshop speakers; but there was an excitement and enthusiasm within the committee for taking on the in-depth study that worked so well this year. Additionally, the committee generated an amazing list of monthly speakers to bring new viewpoints and creative applications to the readings.

Thank you runs the risk of becoming mundane when we think of all the hard work and dedication that Cheryl Martin, RN, LPC puts into making the DSPP Newsletter and Website a success. We have all said it before and I once again extend my heartfelt gratitude to Cheryl for her continued efforts in maintaining a quality product. This year Cheryl took on the additional role of DSPP Secretary and of course, had everything done in a very professional and timely manner.

Carla Pulliam, PhD pulled double duty this year – giving birth to her daughter and coordinating the workshops as well. Carla had every excuse to claim exhaustion, yet she was tireless in her follow through and attention to detail. Those endless phone calls and details to handle can be taxing, yet Carla always came forward with her great smile and warmth, ready to tackle whatever was necessary.

Continued thanks also go out to Rosemarie Rothmeier, PhD for her ongoing role as DSPP Treasurer. In a time

when every organization is faced with financial stress, Rose keeps us up to date and aware of our own financial situation. Rose has agreed to continue on as Treasurer for another year as well!

My thanks also to Jill Nichols and Kathy MacDonald for their willingness to take on the Membership and Continuing Education Committee chairs, respectively. They are both busy doctoral students and Kathy was pregnant as well. I believe it is vitally important to the health of our organization to have students taking active roles. I hope that they both continue to be contributing members of DSPP.

We all know that the exciting events of the Arts Committee have become as much a cornerstone of DSPP as our workshops. Judith Samson, PhD has been a dynamic and inspiring leader of the Arts Committee for many years and while she has now passed the leadership to Denise Humphrey, PhD, I know that the legacy she left in the Arts programs will carry forward. Thank you to Judith for all of her dedication, commitment and creativity in developing such a vibrant arts program.

In this time of transition for so many organizations, I thank John Herman, PhD and Myrna Little, PhD for their continued dedication to offering in depth psychoanalytic learning opportunities for our members and the community. As the Education Committee, they have worked hard to assess the needs of our membership and to bring that extra offering again this year. Dr. Little's Fall Course was met with enthusiasm and delight from her students.

I want to thank Steve Patrick, PsyD for his hard work as President Elect and Division 39 Representative and his ability to bring stipend money from the national level to award to a DSPP student for attendance at the Division 39 Spring Meeting. Additionally, I send my wishes for a successful year in 2003-2004.

Finally, a word of thanks to the membership of DSPP. Without all of our continued commitment to attending meetings, presenting, discussing and most importantly, thinking, we could not exist. So let's look forward to another great year beginning in September!

----- *Melissa Black, Ph.D.*



SPRING WORKSHOP REVIEW

PHILIP A. RINGSTROM, PHD, PSYD

presenting on

***A Relational/Intersubjective Approach
to Conjoint Therapy***

Reported by

PATRICIA WOOD, PHD

The 2002-2003 program year for D.S.P.P. concluded in May with the spring workshop presented by Philip A. Ringstrom, Ph.D., Psy.D. on *A Relational/Intersubjective Approach to Conjoint Therapy*. Dr. Ringstrom is a graduate of and current faculty member at the Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis in Los Angeles. He holds an undergraduate degree from Kansas University and a Ph.D. from USC. He teaches in the graduate departments at UCLA, USC, and Loyola Marymount. He is a reviewer for *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* and the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. He has published in areas of psychoanalysis, self psychology, and couples therapy.

Dr. Ringstrom's presentation centered on his Six-Step Outline of an Intersubjective Approach to Conjoint Therapy. He described the model as not a progressive or linear model but as more like an Escher etching or a Möbius strip.

Step one of the model consists of the therapist instilling hope, perspective, and the possibility of growth through the therapist's attunement to each spouse's subjectivity. The therapist's job in the initial sessions of treatment is to inspire hope in each partner that while they are locked in repetitive patterns, they also have the capacity for developing reparative patterns with each other. It is helpful to talk about each partner's hopes and dreads in the relationship in this process. This stage of treatment results in a more or less instantaneous transference model through the installation of hope for the reparative relationship.

Step two involves the therapist's assertion that none of the three people in the room holds ownership of objective truth but each is the arbiter of what is true in his or her experience. Dr. Ringstrom said that this is not an endorsement of absolute relativity but of perspectival realism. While no one owns the truth, truth can emerge in the dialogue between the spouses in which each person's mental set may change. The couple can find what is true between them. In this way, there is not an identified patient and an "I'm right; you're wrong" scenario is avoided. The therapy can serve as an affective sound mixer in which a new truth can emerge.

Step three consists of an exploration of how each partner's complaint arises in the context of a developmental history of thwarted longings in past relationships. In this context, Dr. Ringstrom suggested an interesting treatment strategy of holding an individual session with each spouse, which the other spouse attends as a silent partner.

In step four, the therapist helps to develop illustrations of how each spouse is vulnerable to reenacting a conflictual past in the service of maintaining a sense of self organization. Thus, the partners can recognize that both of them face threat in changing, that both dread to repeat and dread to change their old patterns. They can come to recognize each other's subjective reality and the sense of grief and loss about the need to change.

Step five emphasizes each partner's capacity to be introspective in the other's presence, to take ownership of his or her contribution to their conflicts. Vulnerability can be welcomed if an atmosphere of safety prevails.

Finally, step six involves transferring the therapeutic function back to the couple and de-idealizing the therapist. This occurs by facilitating each partner's ability to attune to the other's introspection and to facilitate that person's personal growth.

Dr. Ringstrom then took up three essential themes of an intersubjective approach to conjoint treatment. In developing these themes Dr. Ringstrom drew on the work of Benjamin, Ogden, Stolorow, and others. The first theme involves the actualization of each partner's self-experience in the context of the relationship. Partners in intimate relationships are inevitably drawn together by the hope that they will accomplish something in this relationship that is incomplete from their upbringing. Both people long for attuned responsiveness, cohesion, continuity, and worth in the relationship. The actual relationship involves both the return of dreaded and resisted aspects as well as emerging tendrils of hope and growth in the context of the relationship.

The second theme is mutual recognition of each partner's subjective experience. The partners need to move from a subject-object relationship to a subject-subject relationship. In such a relationship, each partner takes the position that he or she, from his or her own subjectivity, is interested in the subjectivity of the other.

The final theme is based on the idea that the relationship has a mind of its own, i.e. a third created by the fact that the thoughts of each spouse influence the other in a

process of intimate and dynamic co-creation. There is the husband, the wife, and something in the middle created by their mutual interaction and influence. Ringstrom finds it helpful to stare into the space between the spouses and ask himself what is there. He often says to couples, “This relationship is telling me ...” The relationship is the third between them.

In the afternoon, an elegant conjoint therapy case was presented by Robert Aberg, Ph.D., past president of DSPP. The case involved a couple, separated from each other and on the verge of divorce. Dr. Ringstrom described them as representing the quintessential situation of rigid obsessive-compulsive man marries expressive hysterical woman and the troubles begin. Dr. Aberg’s calm style and dry, slightly cynical, compassionate sense of humor combined very well with Dr. Ringstrom’s rather salty, rapid-fire, over the top style. The case was a wonderful vehicle for discussion of Ringstrom’s model.

Dr. Black’s leadership style and choice of speakers during this program year have contributed to very interactive, rich discussion periods, and this workshop was no exception to that rule.



PHIL RINGSTROM ON MITCHELL

CULTIVATING A MUTUALLY VITALIZING ENCOUNTER

Reported by
DALE C. GODBY, PHD

Phillip Ringstrom, Ph.D., Psy.D., from the Institute of Contemporary Psychoanalysis in Los Angeles led off our study weekend with a deep and moving tribute to Stephen Mitchell in his grand rounds paper, “The ‘Messy’ Yet Essential Nature of Theory: The Wisdom of Stephen Mitchell’s Relational Perspective”.

Ringstrom told us “Messy” was one of Mitchell’s favorite words. In spite of, or perhaps because of this, he worked hard to bring clear thinking to the analytic task. In reporting on Ringstrom’s rich paper I will focus on the attitude we bring to our daily work with our patients. In the moments before you greet your patient what mind set do you aspire to? As the hour develops, what attitude do you strive for? Ringstrom, who was supervised for a few years by Mitchell told us that Mitchell was always concerned about one state of mind foreclosing on the possibility of others. He quoted Mitchell saying, “I find that aspiring to states of mind like ‘evenly hovering attention’ (Freud), the ‘analytic attitude’ (Schafer), and ‘reverie’ (Bion) foreclose other

possibilities, other kinds of responsiveness to my patients. There are times when it seems useful for my attention to be highly focused not evenly hovering; there are times I feel that my patients need a more genuine response from me, not an attitude; there are times when concerted, careful reasoning seems more fruitful than reverie. I find that I am using myself most productively when I struggle to understand the ways in which a patient is presenting himself to me in a particular session and then to try to reflect on the kinds of responses I find myself making.” (*Influence and Autonomy in Psychoanalysis*, 1997 p. 193)

And how should we evaluate our success within a particular session? Ringstrom distilled a “methodology of self-reflection” from Mitchell’s work and offered it to us as a guide. He told us a key objective of Mitchell’s methodology was to cultivate a “mutually vitalizing encounter” with the patient. Ringstrom summarized six self-reflective questions, which Mitchell seemed thematically to ask, *“Is what we just did here today, opening or closing, vitalizing or deadening, connecting or avoiding, focusing or confusing, liberating or constraining, playfully exploring or just fooling around?”*

So as you approach your next patient bring these questions to mind and see what is opened up and what is foreclosed. As I think of doing this, I can’t help but think of that triad of analytic attitudes: neutrality, abstinence, and anonymity that have long been aspirational goals of our work. Is it time now to dispense with them as some have suggested? Do they foreclose too much? They certainly can when conceptualized in a stereotypic way. But if seen within the context of the therapeutic alliance as Meissner (Neutrality, Abstinence, Alliance. *JAPA*, 46(4), 1998) suggests they can facilitate the alliance and with the above questions can help to cultivate a mutually vitalizing encounter.



Have a Pleasant Summer!

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2002-2003**

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