

# Review of Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Therapies Tracy A. PROUT

The psychoanalytic situation has the power to change subjective awareness and one's experience of the world. And as our clients are changed, so too are we. There

## Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Therapies

By Jeremy D. Safran

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are complex dynamics within the dyad that fortify us, disassemble our preconceived notions, and enrich our understanding of ourselves and the other. It is possible to experience another type of transformation through encountering and absorbing the written word. In this way, I came away from Jeremy Safran's new book, *Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Therapies*, somehow changed. I must admit that I approached the book with skepticism. Only at the tail end of my reading did I become aware of the fact that I had been reading with an unusually critical eye, continuously wondering what made Safran's book unique and questioning the journey he was taking me on. Having read numerous books over the past year that present an overview of psychoanalytic or psychodynamic psychotherapy, perhaps I was tired or simply saturated with this type of writing. I found myself wondering, "What could this text offer that has not already been detailed in similar publications?" (Bateman & Holmes, 1995; Cabaniss, Cherry, Douglas, & Schwartz, 2011; Gabbard, 2010; McWilliams, 2004). However, in the end the answer is: quite a lot.

Safran's book is rooted in two broader contexts. First, *Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Therapies* is part of a larger series of American Psychological Association books—with 24 titles planned—entitled the Theories of Psychotherapy Series. Each book is written by a leading proponent and practitioner of the respective theory, with the entire series geared toward a graduate-level audience. The books are also paired with DVDs that demonstrate the therapy process over the course of six sessions. Safran's book can be coupled with the DVD *Psychoanalytic Therapy Over Time* (featuring Jeremy Safran himself), which was produced in 2008.

The second contextual framework is more substantive and is part of what makes Safran's book a novel contribution to the psychoanalytic literature. Safran's perspective is rooted in his own largely relational paradigm and his ecumenical approach to other theoretical perspectives, even those outside of psychoanalysis. More importantly, Safran is a social constructionist at heart. In the introduction to the text Safran offers a lengthy discussion of what he refers to as "subversive threads in psychoanalysis." He offers the

reader a tapestry rich in texture and nuance that draws together many disparate threads in order to create one of the most inclusive histories of psychoanalysis I have read to date. There are places where the contextualization of psychoanalysis feels labored, but necessary in order to thoroughly grasp Safran's view of the psychoanalytic landscape. For example, there is a substantial discussion of critical theory and the Frankfurt School of social research in the introduction that lays the groundwork for Safran's perspective on psychoanalysis. Although critical of ways in which psychoanalysis has privileged the few, Safran sees contemporary psychoanalytic theory as one that is politically progressive and deeply influenced by Marxist critiques of capitalism. His discussion, much later in the text, of working with diverse client populations returns to this theme of leveling the playing field across culture, class, and other forms of difference. This foundation is what makes *Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Therapies* truly distinct from other introductions to psychoanalytic theory and practice.

It was here, in the introduction to the text, that I encountered my own resistance. A small voice in my head kept asking, "Where are we going?" Safran affords the reader an entrée into psychoanalysis that is novel and refreshing. There were places where I found myself disoriented as a result. However, much like the process of therapy, my resistance eventually yielded and gave way. I came away from the book with a new appreciation of the genesis of psychoanalytic thought and the many social, philosophical, and historical influences that have shaped the current milieu.

Safran does a masterful job summarizing disparate and complex schools of thought within psychoanalytic theory. He is catholic in his respect and appreciation for paradigms as varied as ego psychology, Lacanian theory, attachment theory, motivational systems, and his native relational school. Whereas many battles have been fought across these reified lines, Safran's appreciation for the unique contributions of each is invigorating. Chapter 2 details the many theoretical developments across time and continents that have shaped today's climate of pluralism and cross-pollination. The reader is given the opportunity to travel through basic Freudian

tenets, the development of ego psychology in Britain and the United States, Kleinian and object relations theories, interpersonal analysis, Kohutian perspectives, relational theory, Latin American influences, and Lacanian theory. His writing on these very complex and nuanced perspectives, and the ways in which they have influenced one another, is refreshingly clear and straightforward. Even his discussion of Lacan is digestible, a rare feat matched only by the work of Bruce Fink (2011). The only perspectives that were notably absent were those of neuroscience and neuropsychology, which would be wonderful additions to what is already a pretty thorough history.



This chapter on history also introduces the reader to basic theoretical and practical matters of psychoanalytic therapy—namely, transference, countertransference, therapeutic alliance, and resistance. I was glad to see a more in-depth discussion of these foundational elements of psychoanalysis in the subsequent chapter on theory. The artificial divide between history and theory (chapters 2 and 3) is a bit of a conundrum for authors and readers alike. For example, the brief introduction to transference in chapter 2, "History," left me wanting more. The concept was covered again and in more depth in chapter 3, "Theory," but it felt a bit odd to have two separate discussions of the same concept. The chapter on theory concludes with a wonderfully precise description of attachment as a motivational system.

The longest chapter in the book is the fourth, and its focus is on the therapy process. Organized into two major sections—"Principles of Intervention" and "Change Mechanisms"—this chapter is packed to the gills. Safran's appreciation for vastly different psychoanalytic theories and his own relational nod to intersubjectivity and a two-person psychology are on display here. In a section

on affect regulation, Safran writes, “There was thus a type of mutual evolving relational dance taking place that allowed both me and my clients...to change at the same time” (p.115). There were many places in this chapter where I felt I was grasping long-understood concepts in new and deeper ways. As a teacher of psychodynamic psychotherapy, I found myself placing Post-it notes throughout this section to share with my students. Safran writes about the impact of unconscious motives in this way: “We do things for reasons that are opaque to us and are then surprised and disappointed by the results. This contributes to a sense of being a victim rather than an agent” (p.107). Something about this type of parsimony, which can be found throughout the book, added a new layer of clarity to a long-studied topic.



It is impossible to teach the theory and practice of psychotherapy without cogent case examples. Often texts like these are enhanced with a smattering of vignettes intended to bring the material to life. Safran offers many brief illustrations throughout, especially in chapter 4, “The Therapy Process,” and these are wonderful. But, given that the psychoanalytic therapy is a rich and multilayered process that unfolds over the course of time, it was the two lengthier case studies that I found most informative. The first case presented is that of a four-year, three-day-a-week analysis of a young African American woman named Simone. Safran’s summary of this very complex case is highly engaging, sophisticated, and highlights numerous aspects of psychoanalytically oriented treatment. Their work together demonstrates the movement of client and therapist from the surface to deeper recesses of the mind and individual history. Aspects of Simone’s personality emerge naturally over the course of treatment as Safran reveals his understanding of these dynamics and his private reactions to her style of interacting. There is close attention to the racial differences between

client and therapist, as well as a thoughtful discussion of dreams, early childhood experiences, and the client’s ongoing ambivalence about treatment.

Perhaps the best parts of this particular case are those that represent two sides of the same truth—one part of being a therapist is being comfortable in the “not knowing.” There are aspects of the case that Safran reports were never “fully explored” (p.123) in their work together. I found myself nodding in solidarity with this statement; there are always threads that remain unpursued, truths unrevealed, questions left unanswered in the work we do. This tolerance for ambiguity and acceptance of things that remain opaque is an essential trait of therapists of all orientations. As Safran puts it, “I believe that no story ever completely unfolds in any treatment and that at any given point in time a specific client and therapist are able to reach the depth and accomplish what they are both ready and able to accomplish at that time” (p.134). On the other side of this uncertainty, Safran wraps up his case with a follow-up from the client years after the termination of their work together. These types of epilogues are rare; how many clients move on from therapy never to be heard from again? There is an argument for knowing the effects of our work.

The second case detailed in this part of the book is a six-session treatment conducted for the purposes of the accompanying APA training DVD, *Psychoanalytic Therapy Over Time*, with Amanda, a young Caucasian woman with a history of depression and substance abuse. The inclusion of this case in a text on psychoanalytic therapy will likely be satisfying for clinicians working with time-limited treatment settings (e.g., college counseling, managed care) and for those who are familiar with or eager to learn about brief relational therapy (BRT; Safran, 2002), the core conflictual relationship theme (CCRT; Book, 1997) in brief psychodynamic psychotherapy, and other short-term treatments. I did wonder how the filming of these sessions might have naturally affected the process between client and therapist, but the case still provided valuable insights about how to work through a therapeutic impasse. Safran’s candor and self-disclosure about his countertransference reactions and thoughts about the client between sessions were also very gratifying. Both cases reflect Safran’s

relational stance and his rejection of the myth of the isolated mind.

Finally, Safran concludes with a brief chapter on empirical evaluation of psychoanalytic concepts and treatment and a discussion of future directions for the field. As a psychodynamic researcher, I would have preferred to have seen the evaluation research woven into the rest of the text rather than left for the end. This organization reminded me of courses where “multicultural issues” were identified in a separate lecture as though they were not part and parcel of all that had previously been discussed. Although Safran makes a strong case for the importance of ongoing psychodynamic psychotherapy research—not surprising given that he is a leader in the field—it would be stronger still if evidence and future questions were provided throughout the book. He concludes with more pointed elaboration on the issues of class, culture, and difference that are hallmarks of Safran’s work and many of those from the relational school. His inclusion of Altman’s (2000) self-disclosing story of failed treatment with an African American client was a wonderful example.

This is a gem of a book. Students of psychoanalytic psychotherapy and seasoned practitioners alike will benefit from this member of the Theories of Psychotherapy Series. Safran’s writing is accessible and astute. He takes the reader on a journey through history and social change that is unique in its perspective and its appreciation for the many who have built the foundations of our psychoanalytic thinking. Safran contextualizes the countercultural forces that have shaped today’s psychoanalytic community. He does so with great care and equanimity. He is a tour guide, taking the reader down broad, familiar streets and also down narrow lanes that have subtly shifted the landscape by subverting the mainstream establishment. *Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Therapies* is an elegantly and lucidly written book that synthesizes an incredible amount of information. It is a superb resource for academics, practitioners, and researchers at all levels of training. ■

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