

INTRODUCTION

Tell me a fact and I'll learn. Tell me the truth and I'll believe.
But tell me a story, and it will live in my heart forever.

—Indian proverb

Think back to your own education. You may remember a poignant story told by a professor, perhaps with humor or emotion, that has remained with you long after the lengthy lectures on various theories, facts, and figures have slipped away. Recalling my own education, I remember drifting away during long academic seminars on complicated concepts that even seasoned clinicians still debate today. Once I began teaching in a clinical program, I was discouraged by the paucity of materials that could fully engage my students' minds and imaginations. It became a challenge to find a creative approach that would bring to life difficult psychoanalytic concepts such as transference, compromise formation, and defense mechanisms.

It dawned on me that I teach through stories. Anecdotes of everyday life are my most effective vehicle for teaching complicated psychological concepts to students and supervisees. Stories fire the imagination. They are loved for their simplicity, and yet they capture a deeper wisdom about human nature that can resonate long after they are heard. I recalled running into former students, some from more than twenty years ago, who reminded me of the influence a

story had on their understanding of a concept. In that moment, I recognized that psychotherapy* and personal essays are a perfect union.

In the spring of 2008, while I was attending my final week-end of New Directions, a psychoanalytically oriented writing program under the auspices of the Washington Center for Psychoanalysis, an idea began to crystallize. Energized about the idea of writing a book of personal stories, I approached my colleagues Anne Adelman and Catherine Anderson, who were similarly excited at the prospect of creating a more easily comprehensible teaching tool to ignite their students' curiosity about the complexities of the mind. Working from the belief that "everyone loves a good story" and from our experience that the use of personal vignettes brings theoretically important but conceptually difficult material alive in our classrooms, we began to develop the idea for a shared project. We would demonstrate both the depth and the accessibility of psychodynamic theory through stories. Stories contain universal emotions, which, like life itself, run the gamut from dread to delight.

Our book takes the reader on a journey through stories that range from light-hearted and whimsical anecdotes to gritty tales of challenge and change and, finally, to somber personal laments of pain, loss, and love. Each essay, drawn from our personal and professional histories, speaks uniquely to events in our lives that can be understood in light of certain important psychodynamic concepts. Our stories illuminate how therapists think and work. The vignettes convey developmental or emotional moments that capture the essence of a universal experience. Of course, like any good tale, our stories are borne out of our real lives, although some details and names have been fictionalized. We believe that it is important in work such as ours to write from our own experience, yet the sto-

* When we refer to "psychotherapy," we are referencing all of the psychodynamically oriented psychotherapies. We limit the terms *analyst* and *analysis* to those occasions when we are specifically referencing that particular treatment modality.

ries do not portray the entirety of our worldview. They reflect the authenticity of our voices but not the full range of our experiences. Thus, although the readers' personal histories will inevitably differ from ours on the basis of gender, culture, orientation, and other life circumstances, we hope to convey moments that they will readily recognize and identify with. As in real life, we refer to both male and female therapists/analysts and patients.

We paired these brief, vivid stories from our lives with important psychodynamic ideas in a way that helps readers grasp the underpinnings of analytic theory. In turn, our reflections on the stories are our joint effort to ruminate on the meaning of the stories in light of core theoretical conceptualizations. We guide the reader in appreciating how these concepts inform our understanding of the broad range of human experiences. We believe that this approach will help diminish the apprehension that often interferes with the capacity to master material that is difficult and sensitive enough to produce anxiety and confusion at times.

Where appropriate, we address these issues through a developmental lens, offering stories from early childhood through the present, allowing the reader to explore more fully the unfolding of various psychodynamic concepts across the lifespan. We also view psychodynamic theory through a developmental lens in which theories constantly change and expand as new areas of research are incorporated. To enrich the reader's theoretical understanding and breadth of knowledge, we have relied on a variety of psychodynamic theories. We begin with an appreciation of the foundation of Freudian theory and its offshoot of ego psychology. We touch on the influence of Melanie Klein and other British theoreticians whose ideas expanded the field to include earlier and more primitive psychological states. We also include attachment theory, object relations, and relational and self-psychology, which emerged as the field moved from a one-person psychology to a two-person psychology. We also emphasize the importance of understanding the medical and neurological underpinnings of many disorders.

The difficulty in effectively teaching psychodynamic material is complicated by important trends in the field. In education in general, there is an ever-increasing propensity toward reductionism—that is, an effort to simplify concepts, both biological and psychological, by breaking them down into their smallest measurable increment. Not surprisingly, these attempts to clarify clinical theory have sometimes had the unfortunate consequence of obfuscating many of the nuances essential for understanding. For example, in efforts to investigate the complexities of the mind, the beam has been narrowed until only the tiniest brain structure can be illuminated, devoid of the context in which it operates. In this way, we are at risk of not seeing the forest for the trees.

The opposite is also true. Many important concepts—such as “ego,” “repression,” “Oedipal conflict,” and the “unconscious”—are so widely used and accepted as part of our everyday language that they are no longer associated with the deeper truths of analytic theory. Although these ideas are intuitively understood, their absorption into popular culture cannot help but dilute their rich meanings. It is our hope that through the real-life vignettes presented in the following chapters, the complexity and elegance of each theory will speak directly to the reader.

We provide an understanding of these often esoteric and confusing concepts by placing the definitions within the context of accessible and engaging narratives. With this in mind, we have divided this book into five main sections that explore some central areas of psychodynamic education: theory, development, clinical technique, treatment challenges, and themes of trauma and loss. Neither the scope of the sections nor the range of topics addressed within each section is intended to provide a comprehensive overview of psychodynamic thought. Rather, these vignettes create a potential window through which to view the complex and compelling world of psychodynamic thinking. Once the readers’ appetites have been whetted by these stories, we hope they will be inspired to continue their exploration through further study.

Part I is an introduction to fundamental concepts that are part of the bedrock of psychoanalytic theory. The six stories contained in this section address the following psychoanalytic ideas: *screen memory*, *symbolic representation*, *magical thinking*, *superego development*, *dream theory*, and *transference and enactment*. We chose these concepts out of myriad others to highlight how a therapist may think about a patient's musings during a clinical hour. The theoretical reflections that follow each vignette allow us to introduce a variety of other important, related concepts such as *repression*, *displacement*, and *compromise formation*, among many others.

Part II comprises six vignettes that provide an introduction to some common developmental events. Such experiences include *an infant's first love object*, *the child's fear of bodily harm*, *the adolescent's struggle with identity*, *the young adult's anxiety about leaving the protection of home*, and *adult development and parenthood*. With a developmental perspective on our patients and ourselves, not only do we think about early experiences as retrospective inquiries, but we also can appreciate the maturational context within which those events unfolded.

Part III addresses issues of technique from both sides of the couch. The chapters in this section cover the span of the treatment process. Topics include *beginning the work*, *creating a holding environment*, *understanding therapeutic action*, and *ending the treatment (termination)*. The challenges, joys, and sorrows of beginnings and endings are explored, as is the encounter with various primitive and potentially frightening forces within both the therapist and the patient. The stories in this section portray the powerful processes at work in these intimate encounters. Thus, they illustrate the value that we place on a thoughtful psychodynamic understanding of our experiences.

Part IV deals with the treatment challenges that the therapist encounters during the course of everyday work. The narratives contained in these chapters illuminate the gradual unfolding and deepening of treatment from both the patient's point of view and the therapist's point of view, the numerous and powerful pulls of the

transference and *countertransference* within the therapeutic dyad, and the therapist's struggles to hold the patient firmly and compassionately in mind in the midst of these powerful forces. We chose to address several complex issues in this section—such as the *racial divide* that may be present within any therapeutic relationship, the clinical work with patients who are prone to *self-injury*, and the fallout from *ethical violations* by the therapist—because such topics can be particularly elusive, uncomfortable, and threatening to the treatment.

Finally, our last four stories explore the not infrequent experiences of *trauma*, *loss*, *betrayal*, and *psychic dislocation*. Such experiences have a powerful impact on the individual and on future generations, both consciously and unconsciously. We share four narratives of devastation and coping from the perspectives of personal experience and clinical encounters. It is essential for clinicians to listen for and understand the influence of traumatic history as it is interwoven into a patient's—or even the clinician's own—self-narrative.

In this book, we bring together storytelling and psychotherapy, both of which are borne out of the human urge to be known and to forge connection through language. Our own voices reveal themselves to the reader just as the patient's inner world unfolds before the therapist. In the initial stage of the writing process, we attempted to record our ideas and insights freely. We then stepped back, reflected, and rewrote. Likewise in psychodynamic psychotherapy, individuals put their thoughts and feelings into words and, with their therapist's help, reflect back on the process. With each rewrite or retelling, the memory and meaning may change. Indeed, one often finds that where one started is very different from where one ends up.

We invite you, as students, clinicians, and curious readers, to put yourself in our shoes, to come to know intimately how we experienced and processed some events in our work and personal lives. We hope that you will step back, as we have, and join us in reflecting on these stories and what they tell us about the complexity of the mind and the richness of human experience.

—Kerry Malawista

WEARING MY TUTU TO ANALYSIS
AND OTHER STORIES

