

Epilogue: Conversations Between a Psychoanalyst and a Psychiatry Resident

Aerin Hyun and César A. Alfonso

Abstract: The authors discuss the importance of psychoanalytic training from the perspectives of a psychiatry resident about to begin psychoanalytic training and a psychiatrist who is a training and supervising psychoanalyst. Drs. Hyun and Alfonso discuss psychoanalytic motivations and engage in a dialogue reflecting on the relevance of psychoanalytic training in current psychiatric practice and the profession's need for more dynamically trained psychiatrists. In doing so this article provides further insight from their firsthand experiences as to why young psychiatrists today still choose to engage in psychoanalytic training and its positive impact on their clinical practices.

IS PSYCHOANALYSIS A DECLINING PROFESSION?

Aerin Hyun and César Alfonso: There exists a sentiment among current analysts that interest among psychiatric trainees in psychoanalytic training has declined on a national level. Yet little evidence has been found to support this belief. The interest itself may be alive and well, the problem may lie in difficulty in accessing information, the cost and time commitment of training, and other factors.

Historical anxiety over the decline of the profession has been in existence since the middle of the 20th century, when psychoanalysis had reached its peak in number of trained participants and psychotropic

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medications were just becoming introduced into the profession. Other types of psychotherapy soon became popular, some derived from or informed by psychoanalysis, some reactionary and dismissive of analytic technique in general. Since then, the pendulum has swung toward emphasizing medication management of mental disorders, and along with it the perception of a decreased need for psychotherapy, both within and outside of the profession. Of interest is that the number of medical psychoanalysts in the U.S. has been steady over the past decade, with an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 certified and practicing. Economic and social factors have created an environment in which there is professional incentive to see as many patients as possible in an hour in order to maintain a viable practice. Despite this, preliminary surveys of residency training programs indicate that this may not be a reflection of a lack of interest, but rather an issue of lack of accessibility, time, and/or financial means to pursue such an endeavor (Katz, Tuttle, & Housman, 2011). When polled, residents from four different residency training programs around the country responded that they are on the whole interested in learning more about psychoanalytic training and/or pursuing a career in it (Katz, Tuttle, & Housman, 2011). While only 6–8% of psychiatrists in the United States complete formal psychoanalytic training, many more recognize the usefulness of this theory of the mind and human behavior, and apply psychoanalytic principles in their psychotherapeutic practice.

Psychoanalytic institutes across the country, in sensing these constraints, have altered their training requirements and have also begun to offer abbreviated training programs to introduce potential candidates to psychoanalytic training without the time or financial commitment involved. Various programs now offer the option of postgraduate psychotherapy training to residents who have an interest in further developing their skills beyond what residency training programs may be able to offer. Moreover, residency training programs around the country not affiliated with psychoanalytic institutes as a resource for teaching staff have also begun to hire outside faculty members to come to their programs to conduct intensive seminars and workshops and provide lectures on the finer points of psychodynamic therapy skill acquisition. Funding in the form of fellowships and awards to analytically trained attending physicians also makes it possible for those residents in areas who do not otherwise have access to this type of in-depth training to be exposed to this type of work, encouraging them to pursue additional outside training after graduating from residency.

On an international level, analysts from the United States have begun to institute programs and lectures in neighboring countries, for which there also exists a high demand (Fishkin, Fishkin, Leli, Katz, & Snyder,

in press). This occurs in the form of workshops and videoconference supervisions/sessions. The advent of planes, telephones, and now webcams has made this possible in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The Internet makes didactic materials more accessible than ever before. Psychoanalytic training, once accessible to an elite few within the medical population, has slowly begun joining the ranks of an information technology that should once again bring training into the mainstream. The notion that the profession is dying may therefore not be due to a lack of interest, but rather a lack of exposure. Perhaps in addition to evidence that psychoanalysis actually works by brain imaging and research studies we also need evidence that there in fact exists national and international interest by medical students and residents in further training and exposure, both within and outside of the profession, as well as further research on the most effective ways to train individuals in psychodynamic therapy and psychoanalysis. However, the fact remains that as it stands today psychoanalytic training still involves a considerable commitment of both time and financial resources.

WHY UNDERGO PSYCHOANALYTIC TRAINING?

Why would a psychiatric resident embark on psychoanalytic training? What are the motivations to begin training and how would we convey these to an audience of prospective candidates comprised of medical students, psychiatry residents, and early career psychiatrists?

Aerin Hyun: At first I thought this would be such an easy set of questions to answer, especially since I have wanted to become an analyst for more years of my life than not. I could discuss my love of both literature and medicine, and how since first learning about psychoanalysis in my college literary courses I had always thought it would be the perfect way to combine these two otherwise disparate fields that were both equally a part of my life. I was all set to begin writing. And then, the writer's block hit. A paralytic, debilitating case that I just could not shake, try as I might. And so, as usual, I waited for it to pass. And waited. Unlike previous occasions when I have suffered from writer's block, this time something different occurred. I began to observe the block itself, rather than just try to work my way around or through it. In the past I just panicked, but this time the observations also kicked into gear (the benefit of having been in analysis for nine months prior), and soon the observations began to overtake the panic.

César Alfonso: I remember starting my analytic training twenty years ago. As a psychiatric resident hungry to gain psychotherapeutic skills, I had inadvertently intellectualized and overidealized the didactic

process, eagerly waiting to devour everything written in a field that spanned a century, only to realize, in retrospect, that the most valuable aspect of my training would be my training analysis. One has to reread everything one learns during the years of training, anyway, several times, and years later, to truly understand the meaningfulness, richness, and depth of psychoanalytic theory. But when in analysis, from day one, a process of liberation unfolds.

Aerin Hyun: That's the beauty of being in analysis and of psychoanalytic training itself. It is where theory meets practice, with an increasing awareness of how this gap becomes bridged. In fact, awareness itself becomes critical to the bridging process. In 2010 the residents in my program had decided to form interest groups. The two with which I am involved are the psychoanalysis and writing interest groups, and both drew in a robust crowd of residents. I found it interesting that there existed a great deal of overlap between participants of both groups, and that everyone in the writing group turned out to also be grappling with their own form of writer's block. The wheels began turning. I know that correlation does not imply causation (although one could contend that the unconscious does not differentiate between the two) and that just as many aspiring writers not interested in psychoanalysis also greatly suffer from writer's block. However, the very notion of a potential relationship between the two also caught my newly dynamically trained eye. Is it possible, I wondered, that the very basis for my interest in psychoanalysis was also somehow contributing to the writer's block that tormented me? And was it also contributing to my current block, the worst of my life as I have dramatically come to consider it, when faced with the prospect of *writing* about my interest in *psychoanalysis*? Furthermore, could the skills involved in identifying and better understanding this relationship help me not only in the short run to complete this essay, but also in the long run by making me a better clinician? And, most importantly, why do so many of us still want to get involved in a field that has for so many years been considered to be in crisis in the first place?

THE MERGER FANTASY

Aerin Hyun: Since first learning of it in my undergraduate literary theory courses, I felt that psychoanalysis represented the perfect merger between art and science. I think that many of us who ultimately decide to pursue psychoanalytic training feel similarly. We share a scholarly need to examine things, human suffering for example, from multiple vantage points in a manner that medicine alone could never fully sat-

isfy. As I continued on to medical and graduate schools, my ultimate goal became to facilitate communications between these two historically, stereotypically distinct realms. Throughout graduate school, I insistently and perpetually resided in the border between them, only to discover it to be a very murky place indeed.

As a dual degree candidate, I regularly switched back and forth between the two fields, and vividly recall being asked during residency interviews whether I believed a merger between the two could ever truly occur in my brain, and if so what would that look like? Would it be like two simultaneous but parallel processes, or more like two languages combined into a third? I responded that after 15 years of training, I still didn't know but would let her know as soon as I reached that place. And I really thought at the time that I would, for I had convinced myself that psychiatry residency and then psychoanalytic training would finally get me there.

At the time and ever since, I have learned to accept that inhabiting these two worlds is much like residing in two different countries, speaking two different languages that may at times resemble one another, like Spanish and Portuguese. Returning from one to the other inevitably resulted in several months of confusion, during which I lived in this gray zone, understanding neither language fully. I always thought that with time, one day I would be able to inhabit both places simultaneously and see things from a clear vantage. After many years of trying, I am beginning to wonder if this is possible. Given that it is difficult to physically reside in two countries at once or speak two languages simultaneously, why would one think that there could ever be a true fusion between the art and the science of psychiatry? It made me wonder about this merger fantasy, and how it exists both within and outside of the profession.

César Alfonso: Many who choose to go into psychiatry, and medicine in general, do so in response to the lure of this call to merge the two domains of sciences and humanities. This appears to be the case even more with individuals pursuing psychoanalytic training. From its inception, psychoanalysis has benefited from cross-fertilization with other fields. Take, for instance, the concept of "empathy," one so central to our psychotherapy practice. The word "empathy" was first used in the field of Aesthetics in the 19th century as an attempt to define the emotional experience of contemplating a work of art. The extrapolation of "*Einfühlung*" from Aesthetics to Psychoanalysis (Alfonso & Eckardt, 2005; Pigman, 1995; Vischer, 1873) opened the doors to an interdisciplinary exchange that has undoubtedly enriched both fields. Psychoanalysis, as a cultural entity, has enriched other fields, most notably literary theory and criticism, art history, and fine arts.

Aerin Hyun: So, in observing my writer's block I noted the following. Nearly everyone in the psychoanalytic interest group also wanted to write and was suffering from writer's block. There exists and I harbor a science and humanities merger fantasy which has resulted in me spending much of my life in an intellectually foggy no man's land. This series of observations led to the revelation that perhaps my very interest in psychoanalysis itself was somehow contributing to and responsible for my block. In other words, maybe my interest in psychoanalysis—a field that presupposes my interest in a relationship between science and the humanities and therefore relegated me to residing in this murky undefined intellectual space—was the very thing preventing me from writing about it. Furthermore, identifying first that a relationship existed and then examining this relationship between my interest and my block was the very thing that helped me work my way out of it, bringing a newfound clarity to this otherwise confusing place.

When our patients become faced with roadblocks in their lives or even within sessions, we use these blocks as tools to better understand and help them, if even by showing them our attempts to do so. Such tools occur in the form of the analysis of the transference, countertransference, language, dreams, fantasies, etc. Similarly examining my writer's block, the nature of it and its associations helped me work through my own block. This was made possible by having begun to learn to do this (the examining of blocks and inhibitions for clues on how to better understand) in both sessions with patients and in my own analysis. Engaging in psychoanalytic training further refines our ability to do this, and in doing so contributes to our personal analyses, and vice versa. So in thinking about the original question posed at the outset, "why undergo psychoanalytic training?" and in working through the ensuing writer's block, I have discovered my response: because I am someone who wants to know the answer in the first place. I want to know why "why undergo psychoanalytic training?"—to continually place myself in that fog and state of tension and then to work my way out of it, providing clarity along the way for both myself and for my patients. Engaging in psychoanalytic training and in my own personal analysis will enable me to continue to improve my means of doing so. It would have never otherwise occurred to me to examine the nature of my writer's block itself as a means of overcoming it. In that way, my experience has been similar to César's: what began as an intellectual curiosity and endeavor has crossed over into the realm of the intensely personal. In other words, what began as a quest to explain an intellectual interest in psychoanalysis has ended in a personal revelation about my interest, my writer's block and a possible relationship between the two.

Aerin Hyun and César Alfonso: It has been our objective in writing this essay and revealing the process by which it came to be written that this would simultaneously demonstrate ways in which psychodynamic and psychoanalytic training may contribute to a better understanding of ourselves and of the patients whom we treat. Whereas it may have been the spirit of our intellectual curiosities that drew us to the profession, it will remain the intensely personal nature of our discoveries within it that will keep us here.

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