BLOG · 2013

The Impossible Profession — Part 2

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The second blog post in the series. Having established that psychotherapy is genuinely an impossible profession, this part explores the specific nature of the impossibility — the paradox of enactment as both the problem and the solution, and why the most honest and effective response to this paradox is not resolution but transformation.

KEY THEMES

— Enactment as both the problem and the solution

— Why there is no way out, only a way in

— The transformative potential of the impossible position

— The dangers of premature resolution

— Supervision as the space for the impossible

No Way Out, Only a Way In

If the previous part established that psychotherapy is an impossible profession, this part explores the specific nature of that impossibility — and particularly the central role of enactment.

The therapist is inevitably drawn into enactment: into re-enacting, with the client, the very wounding dynamic which the client has brought to therapy. This is not a failure of the therapist's technique or awareness — it is the natural consequence of the fact that the client's wound is relational in origin, and therefore inevitably seeks a relational expression in the therapeutic space.

The common response to this recognition is to try to prevent enactment — to become more aware, more boundaried, more skilled, so that one does not get caught up in the client's patterns. This is understandable but ultimately futile. The more sophisticated response, which the relational tradition has been slowly arriving at, is captured in a phrase which I have found increasingly useful: there is no way out of the enactment, only a way in.

Enactment as Both Problem and Solution

The paradox of enactment is that it is simultaneously the problem and the solution. It is the problem because it means the therapist is, to some degree, repeating the client's wounding — playing the role of the wounding object, doing to the client something like what was done to them. This is obviously counter-therapeutic, and it is what makes the therapeutic endeavour 'impossible'.

But enactment is also the solution — or at least, the vehicle through which the solution becomes possible. When the wound is being re-enacted in the therapeutic relationship, it is alive in the room in a way which makes it potentially available for transformation. The very fact that the therapist has been drawn into a particular relational pattern with the client means that the wounding dynamic is present, not just represented.

The key question is not whether enactment will occur — it will — but whether it will occur entirely unconsciously (leading to negative re-traumatisation) or with sufficient degrees of awareness to allow the spontaneous transformation which the system seeks.

The Role of Supervision

This is where supervision becomes particularly important. The therapist who is in the middle of an enactment cannot, by definition, see it clearly — the enactment is constituted precisely by the mutual blindness it produces in both parties. Supervision creates the possibility of a third perspective: not outside the enactment entirely, since the therapist will inevitably bring something of the enactment into the supervisory relationship (parallel process), but sufficiently different to allow aspects of the dynamic to become visible which were invisible in the room.

For supervision to serve this function, it needs to be a space in which the therapist can bring the reality of their experience — including the shameful, confused, frustrated, defeated aspects of it — without fear of judgement. This is not merely an ethical nicety; it is a functional requirement for the supervision to do its work. If the therapist edits their account to make it more professional or more palatable, the dynamic which most needs to be understood is precisely what will be lost.

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