

DAVID E. SCHARFF

**CLOSING PANEL:
PSYCHOANALYSIS,
CULTURE,
AND SOCIETY**



The Psychoanalytic Century

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Closing Panel: Psychoanalysis, Culture, and Society

David E. Scharff, Chair

Curtis Bristol, Paula Ellman, Dorothy Evans Holmes, Donald Kuspit, Michael Moskowitz, Stefan Pasternack, Vamik Volkan (Panelists)

The presentations of the second day included a video case presentation of an African-American woman artist who spoke of her own struggles and those of her family with race, and of her difficulties in loving. This presentation had the purpose of lending a tangible clinical example to the issues of creativity and the uses of art, psychoanalytic explorations of problems in loving, and the effects of race on the individual and the culture. There was also a jointly authored paper read by Paula Ellman, Ph.D., "The Riddle of Femininity"⁵⁰ written by a study group of women analysts, which explored the application of the two concepts of "primary femininity and the castration complex in the clinical treatment of women." The paper described a woman who used phallic identifications as a defense to deal with her developmentally compromised feminine identification.

David Scharff: We know that we have had to omit many issues in the evolution of psychoanalysis from consideration in our conference. In this closing panel discussion we have an opportunity to discuss issues which you feel we have missed or that you would like to elaborate on. I'm also hoping that

people will draw on clinical experience and clinical issues to summarize our experience of being together for these three days to consider the relevance and evolution of analysis.

Stefan Pasternack: While I was here this afternoon, I happened to come across a book that intrigued me by Jessica Benjamin, called *The Bonds of Love*. Thumbing through it, one of the chapters that caught my attention was the chapter on master and slave. The issue has to do with not seeing the patient in the clinical example as black or white, but seeing her as a woman who might be struggling with issues that any woman, or man who is conflicted with the issues of longing to submit versus fear of submission, or the desire to dominate through submission by getting someone else to please you, or getting mixed up in a sado-masochistic enslavement. The master/slave configuration is not always white/non-white or Jew/non-Jew, but may have other universal determinants.

Dorothy Holmes: Stefan is a long-time colleague, and we always have lots of comity between us. I think I agree with you, but I may disagree with you at the same time. Ultimately what you are saying is absolutely correct. But, if the master/slave frame of reference is vivid and important to the patient, the first thing is to be open to understanding it, to appreciate it in the way the patient needs you to if the patient is making reference to race. As I said in my remarks, I am packing that in terms of giving the patient wide latitude to state it any way she wishes, to state it is the first order of business. Keeping in mind that we know racial issues are rich

symbolically, and if the matter stayed locked-in only to race, then we would have some concern about the obdurate quality of the defense and would need to see what we could do to help that along.

David Scharff: I thought one thing that the woman I presented did was to be articulate about the developmental tangle of race, issues with her parents, issues of where she grew up, and her struggle to form a relationship with men in an ordinary, committed way. These things in her life are so inextricably bound up together that we should not consider them separately.

Elizabeth Rundquist (New York City): I am part of the International Institute of Object Relations Theory (IIORT) core program here, and I think I am the only art therapist here. I would like to thank Dr. Kuspit for his presentation. I think the job of a therapist as well as an art therapist is to analyze, yes, but not to interpret so as to kill the affect, but to help patients to internalize the affect (however one does that) and make a synthesis in regards to the patient. Your paper on Freud's need to analyze without regard to the aesthetic helped me think about that clinical application. Thank you very much.

Donald Kuspit: Thank you.

Eric Milliner (Rochester, Minnesota): I wanted to highlight one of the comments that was offered briefly by both presenters on race: The dynamics concerning race and ethnicity are by no

means limited to reality, even though when they exist in social climates they have tremendous potential for harm. I am currently treating a Scandinavian Lutheran young man who believes me to be German, and both Nazi and Jewish, because those are themes that embody traits within his own character, tendencies toward tremendous aggression and identification with the aggressor, of almost delusional paranoid intensity about retaliation. Those are enacted and played out by him in the transference in ways that have nothing to do with the reality of either his background or mine.

Walton Ehrhardt (New Orleans): I'm a German Lutheran pastor, which is why I want to speak. The element in which I have practiced for more than 30 years has been in the domain of pastoral counseling. I want particularly to thank the last two presenters for helping me to get in touch with what seems to me to be an element that we have alluding to throughout the conference. Freud established for us a rather radical basis of thinking about ourselves as human beings, and about the illusions we claim. These become powerful cultural definitions about who we are as individuals and collectively as groups. We claim them with a great amount of prejudice. Your contributions today have made this weekend so rich that at times it has even been overstimulating. Nevertheless, I regret that we did not make space to think about the way Freud's contribution can help us rethink our approach to religion, faith, and spirituality, elements that are dynamically powerful in the lives of all of our patients in some form or another. So again, thanks.

Stefan Pasternack: It is also interesting to me that Freud never really acknowledged his Jewishness. There is another book on sale here called *Freud's Moses*. In that book the author describes that Freud understood Hebrew and had extensive religious education, because in the Vienna of his day all children had two hours of mandatory religious education after school. Freud never clearly integrated or acknowledged his Jewishness because of his fear that psychoanalysis would then be written off because of stereotypes about Judaism. This is another example of an effect of racism. Racism and its consequences deserve a whole conference of their own.

Cathy Agar (Nebraska): I am not a clinician, I'm an English teacher from Nebraska. What Dr. Holland said about countertransference and its relationship to literary criticism is very important. Matthew Arnold, a nineteenth-century literary critic and poet, wrote a book called *On The Study of Celtic Literature*. He knew almost nothing about Celtic literature and had not read most of it. He characterized the Celtic character almost exclusively on the basis of stereotypes, but one of the things he said was that the Celt partakes of the feminine idiosyncrasy. In that book you can find everything you have described in clinical situations: the attachment of Celticism to the mother, Teutonic to the father, the feminine object versus the masculine object and master versus slave, because you have an analogy of the Celt and Teuton united in the English character as a marriage in which the husband, the Teuton, has to dominate. So, there is an example of how literary criticism can use what you are talking about.

Nell Scharff (New York City): I'm also an English teacher. I have been thinking today about the relationship between individual and social responsibility. I was thinking about the two talks on race in relation to Dr. Volkan's talk about international relations in which he alluded to the way racial and ethnic conflicts erupt into war. I want to link these issues with Dr. Holland's talk about reader response. Reader-response theory emphasizes how each person's individual response to a text is equally valid. This is true despite what the realities might be in the text. There is a social and ethical responsibility to understand text from the perspective that it comes from, and to extend that to an understanding of people. Reading text is learning how to understand what people mean, and not just a matter of giving in to a solipsistic exercise. My question is, how do you see this connection? You talk about social responsibility and you recommended a book about affirmative action, but then in the clinical examples, the responsibility seems to be to know your own stuff as a way to help the patient explore themselves beyond just race. But where does that meet social responsibility? And how do you think about that in your practice? Those matters also seem relevant to me as a teacher.

Michael Moskowitz: I have a couple of associations. First, in terms of social responsibility, we really have to take on social responsibility within our organizations. I have to say that at the New York University Post-Doctoral Program in Psychoanalysis for many years we took this on as an issue. We developed a committee, of which I was part of for 10 to 12 years, to try to get a more diverse faculty and student

body at NYU. We met with a lot of opposition—in the best meaning of opposition. People said, “It’s a big problem, what can we do about it?” Fortunately we had a cohesive committee that just kept at it. We ended up adding a number of faculty—Latino and African-American faculty. It was somewhat harder to increase registration in the student body. I think taking a real role in your professional organizations is critical.

Secondly, it’s easy to say, as Freud did, “I can reach across any boundary of culture and class because we are all more human than otherwise.” To some extent that’s true, but there is still a difficult dialectic. You see people falling in love across boundaries of culture, class, and language. Soldiers in foreign countries end up marrying people they can’t even speak to. Love can transcend race and prejudice. But there is an issue of trauma that comes up in the treatment of oppressed peoples. I first saw it because in my family there are people who are children of Holocaust survivors, whose analysts didn’t even note that fact. Then, things changed in the next generation. If an analyst who was the child of a Holocaust survivor didn’t bring it up, it became the analyst’s responsibility to introduce it, because it was an unspoken trauma. I think the knowledge of that is important. That also applies to Vietnam veterans who went through years of treatment at the VA without anybody ever thinking, “Vietnam! What was the impact of the war on their lives?” So I think it’s one thing to say that we can reach across these boundaries, but unless you can fully understand the fact of racism, it’s hard for us who aren’t subject to it to fully understand it.

Nevertheless, to whatever extent we can understand it and immerse ourselves in the world of the oppressed other, it helps. It remains a difficult thing to reach across boundaries to understand the suffering and pain caused by the culture in which we live.

Dorothy Holmes: We shouldn't overvalue or underestimate the power of what happens in the consultation room. After all, the people we treat go out into various walks of life. They can have magnificent influence if they are no longer encumbered by these factors. I also agree with Michael: Our organizations are, in the main, woefully inadequate in terms of their response to these issues. We must press on there. Not only to do with race, but also to do with how one's powers can become encumbered by whatever one's conflicts are. We should keep in mind the marvelous story of Mark McGuire. He openly attributes to four years of psychotherapy an important basis in his magnificent success in baseball.

Donald Kuspit: I want to point out something outside my usual bailiwick. The discourse in modernity on master/slave that has been discussed so much here is Hegel. Before Freud there was Hegel. Hegel was a very great psychologist in his own way. We keep using the term "dialectic," which I remind you also comes from Hegel. Hegel pointed out something extremely important that was partly addressed by Professor Holmes: the interdependence of the master and slave. The slave has power over the master, as well as the master having power over the slave, psychologically and social-

psychologically. Hegel has one of the first psycho-social models in formulating this dialectic.

I also want to remind you of Pinter's famous play *The Servant*, which is a marvelous example of this dynamic in literature. You have a very peculiar thing happening when the servant takes over the master's situation. I also could point out that Marx's whole bourgeois/ proletariat dialectic comes right out of Hegel, as Marx acknowledges. I myself believe, and I have no way of proving this, that certain of Freud's ideas about love of the relationship between object and self-come out of Hegel as well. I am sure that Freud was aware of Hegel, indirectly. Freud did acknowledge Schopenhauer, and I would expect behind Schopenhauer there is Hegel, because Schopenhauer was a reaction to Hegel, just as Nietzsche was.

David Scharff: And, of course, object relations comes straight out of Hegel. Fairbairn was closely influenced by Hegel, whose teachings he studied as an undergraduate.

Sandra Snow (Baltimore, Maryland): I would like to hear Dr. Volkan's opinion on this: It seems to me that when you were talking this afternoon, you were illuminating the problem on the national level that we have just addressed on the micro-level. I would just like to comment that no one can be exempt from absorbing all of the "isms" in the culture when they've been so institutionalized. If we think of culture as Dr. Volkan suggested as "mother," then in the service of our need to preserve that parent in order to preserve self, it seems to me that is an intrapsychic struggle we all have. All of us, across

class, race, gender, or whatever “ism” there is, engage in such a struggle individually. On a national level it becomes even more complex.

Vamik Volkan: We have a project in a community in Richmond, which is in an area that I think is number one or two as a drug and crime capital in this country. All the people are African-Americans. We have been studying this particular community for about a year and we see the same kind of things we see in international relations. Many unconscious things. For example, if you take look at a map of the backroads of the community, you see that a person from that community cannot take a bus to go two miles away to a museum. It is hard to tell if this isolation is planned consciously or unconsciously, but it doesn't matter really. It is just like prison. The internalization of this situation is such that there are other communities and areas where the children would not go, even though they're not in chains. The inhabitants internalize these kinds of restrictions, so that the most psychoanalytic thing we could do was to buy a bus for them, to rent a driver and a chaperone so that kids could go to a museum whenever they wanted to. That is a psychoanalytic response.

Paula Ellman (Washington, DC): I have been listening to what you are saying about what is inbred in the workings of the city, and the earlier question about what we could do to be more socially responsible. My reaction is in line with Dorothy Holmes's suggestion for self-analysis. We do need to try to be aware of our own aggression. Earlier comments about our

discomfort seeing a black woman on videotape, and about the image of master/slave that has been with us this afternoon, may have engendered even more discomfort for us. This causes discomfort because of our own aggression, because in a way we were cast in the role of the master observing this black woman exposing herself and being quite vulnerable. I think that's what the discomfort had to do with, the identification with the master in the master/slave dynamic.

Curtis Bristol: Can I make a comment about the master/slave and return to theory and to Freud? Remember that the mother of love that I spoke about is the idealized, unrealistic love of the mother. There is also the other mother, the mother of hate. The ambivalence that is indigenous to all human beings leads to an externalization of hate onto the available external social receptors. Then the hate is reinforced in the social context that absorbs it. Whether you consider aggression innate, which is Freudian, or self-psycho logically aroused within a context, or as narcissistic rage, it's all there to be dealt with by externalization, denial, splitting, projection, projective identification, and fantasy formation. Freud said that this is psychologically intrinsic to all people equally. Everyone has this mechanism.

Charles Ashbach (Philadelphia): I want to follow up Jill Scharff's observation that the pervert attacks differences. The person with a perversion also makes attacks against generational differences and against sexual differences, as well as racial, religious, or cultural differences. But it is not just the person

with a perversion who has this potential. Difference itself threatens to annihilate our narcissism. To some extent, a perverse hatred of difference is therefore a permanent feature of the human condition.

David Scharff: As we close this discussion and this conference, I am reminded that the Freud exhibit at the Library of Congress has given us an opportunity to examine our origins and our evolution, to think about what psychoanalysis has to offer the wider world. That's what our discussion today has been about—the application of analysis to the culture, to the arts, to ourselves in our wider sense. It is fitting that we closed with Michael Moskowitz's and Dorothy Holmes's presentations, which have led us to think about the context in which our work exists, a social context to which we must relate fundamentally in order to have any meaningful impact.

I want to end by thanking the panel and all of you as a wonderful audience, as we draw this celebration and examination of Freud's legacy to a close.