



# PSPP Currents

For Mental Health Professionals Interested in the Psychoanalytic Perspective

A local chapter of the Division of Psychoanalysis of the American Psychological Association

www.pspp.org

July, 2005

## President's Column

### What is PSPP?

"OK, but what is PSPP?"

This question, perhaps tongue in cheek, but maybe not, was asked as an aside by one of the graduate students attending our recent brunch. The brunch meeting, our second annual such event, was held in early May, and brought together graduate students from the area whose interest in and dedication to a psychoanalytic perspective ranged from deeply committed to curious and wanting to know more.

The tongue-tripping acronym aside (we have limited flexibility there, after all; those psychologists and psychoanalysts living in cities that don't start with a "P" have a few more letters to work with!), it is worth restating, from time to time, what exactly "PSPP" stands for, and, perhaps more importantly, what exactly PSPP stands for.

The basics are straightforward enough: The Philadelphia Society for Psychoanalytic Psychology was founded in 1984 by a group of local psychologists, all of whom were either trained or training as psychoanalysts, or who had had inten-

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## Whiteness:

### A Blind Spot in and out of the Consulting Room

Neil Altman's paper, titled *Whiteness*, which he presented at PSPP's annual spring meeting on March 19th, 2005, is not only a worthy contribution to the psychoanalytic literature on racism, but also represents the type of courageous writing that we need to see more of in our field. In *Whiteness*, Altman strives to uncover and describe what it means to be a "white" person in the United States today. In the process of doing this, he cites research studies, sociological surveys, and literary references and passages. In addition, he presents clinical material from his own practice, in which he bravely describes how his own disavowed aspirations to "whiteness" were a complicating factor in his treatment of a female patient with her own aspirations to upward mobility.

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## **President's Message** (continued from page 1) \_\_\_\_\_

sive postdoctoral training in psychoanalysis but were not matriculated in a formal training program. PSPP was founded as the local chapter of the Division of Psychoanalysis (39) of the American Psychological Association; Division 39 continues to be our "parent" organization.

Those active in PSPP have continued to seek psychoanalytic training, either with the local American Psychoanalytic Association affiliated institutes (now unified as the Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia), or through lay institutes such as the Philadelphia School for Psychoanalysis, as well as through programs in other cities. However, many of our members are psychologists and social workers who have continued to deepen their understanding and practice of psychoanalytically informed therapy through continuing study outside formal training institutes. Our sister organization, PCPE (the Philadelphia Center for Psychoanalytic Education), offers intensive continuing education seminars that bring together members of PSPP and others from the community to study and discuss readings, and to participate in intimate day-long workshops with prominent people in the field. The perspectives represented within the organization reflect the diversity within current psychoanalysis, with our members representing classical, relational, object relations, self-psychology, and Lacanian traditions in differing mixes.

Which brings us to the more demanding question: what does PSPP stand for? As a "society" we are a community, and a large part of the importance of our organization lies in that: we offer programs and other ways to become involved that connect us with one another. The "psychology," while used inclusively (i.e., our membership includes social workers and psychiatrists as well), reflects our ongoing connection to Division 39. More than simply an umbrella organization to unite local groups, Division 39 has evolved, over the last twenty or so years, into an extremely fertile ground for some of the most exciting and alive discussions in psychoanalysis. The connection of our local chapter is highlighted especially right now, as PSPP member and past-President David Ramirez is the current President of Division 39, and as we prepare to host next year's Spring Meeting of the Division: "Love, Desire & Passions: Variety, Enigma, and the Disruption of Psychoanalysis."

In explaining the "psychoanalytic" part of our name, I can't think of a better way to do so than connecting it with the title of this meeting. What we share, as a group, is a *passion* for psychoanalysis—as theory, approach to treatment, and as a vital and creative contribution to society. This is the core of what PSPP stands for, and who we are. And finally, there's that first "P"—and why not proudly state our connection to the City of Brotherly Love?

*Rachel Kabasakalian-McKay, PhD*

# Committee Reports

## Treasurer's Report

As of the end of May 2005, the PSPP treasury has a balance of \$12,205. Our most recent large event was the annual Spring Meeting with Dr. Neil Altman. We brought in \$2,685 for this event and spent \$3,670, for a loss of \$985. Some loss is usually budgeted for the Fall Dinner each year, because of the cost of providing a full dinner for our members. Our goal is to make a profit or at least break even for the annual Spring Meeting. As a point of comparison, profit or loss amounts are listed below for recent PSPP Fall Dinner and Spring Meeting events.

### *Profit/loss amounts for previous years:*

2004 Fall Dinner, Linda Hopkins	cost	\$590
2004 Spring Meeting, Mark Epstein	profit	\$4685
2003 Fall Dinner, Jonathan Slavin	cost	\$960
2003 Spring Meeting, Jody Messler Davies	cost	\$400
2002 Fall Dinner, Sue Grand	cost	\$1600
2002 Spring Meeting, Karen Maroda	even	\$0

*by Allison Smenner, PhD  
Treasurer*

## Membership Committee Report

### *Welcome New PSPP Members!*

Urvashi Bhagat, MD  
Laura Lipitz MEd  
Anna Hiatt, MA  
Michael Chabot, MSW, LCSW  
Kathleen Ross, PhD  
Matthew Whitehead, BS

*Jill McElligott, LSW  
Interim Membership Chair*

## Very Important Notice From Division 39

To Our Readers:

As part of an initiative supported by the Division 39 Board to make Division 39 more useful to early career psychologists, the Task Force on Early Career Psychologist/Psychoanalysts, including Winnie Eng, Marilyn Charles, and colleagues, has compiled a survey to be completed online. The survey, entitled, "An Exploratory Examination of the Needs of Early Career Psychologists", can be accessed by going to the following address:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=875531048865>

Please take a few moments to visit this site and complete the survey. This initiative is an important one, both for early career psychologists, and for psychoanalytic psychology.

If you encounter difficulty accessing the site, please send an email message to Rachel Kabasakalian-McKay at [rkmckay@earthlink.net](mailto:rkmckay@earthlink.net).

Thank you for supporting this very important endeavor.

# Report on the PCOP Open House

On Sunday afternoon, April 3, 2005, the Task Force on Public Relations of the Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia hosted an Open House for people interested in pursuing one of the training programs either in adult or child psychotherapy or in adult or child psychoanalysis. Although Kelly Drive was closed due to heavy rains and flooding, it seemed that nearly everyone who had RSVP'd managed to make their way to Rockland Mansion for the program. There was time before and after the featured speakers for people to mingle with members of the Center, both faculty and students and candidates in the programs, and to take a look at Rockland, the new home of PCOP, now in an advanced state of elegant renovation.

The theme of the featured presentations was *Shadows of Trauma: Implications for Treatment of Children and Adults*. After being introduced by Shireen Kapadia, PhD, Chair of the Task Force, Drs. Jennifer Bonovitz and Salman Akhtar, both Training and Supervising Analysts at PCOP, spoke. Dr. Bonovitz explained why she prefers psychoanalysis over psychotherapy in the treatment of patients for whom early trauma constitutes a significant developmental event, or series of events. In her work, she had become frustrated with stalled and unsuccessful psychotherapies, and found in psychoanalysis a way of working that effected deep change over time with traumatized patients. She emphasized the continuum of trauma and its ongoing presence in the personal as well as the political spheres, citing past and present "holocausts" and genocides, as well as the intergenerational transmission of trauma. In addition to acute traumatic events, and often more

deforming in effect, are the daily, cumulative traumas of neglect and impaired attachments, often themselves a sequellae of traumatic parental histories. Dr. Bonovitz reminded us that this is an exciting time in psychoanalytic scholarship, when data from neuropsychanalytic research, developmental observational research, and attachment theory are coming together to provide information on the development of brain structures in the context of relationship with primary attachment figures. This data is helping clinicians to form a more complete and precise picture of how early relationships affect the development of cognition, memory, linguistic and narrative skills, as well as key aspects of affect regulation.

Dr. Akhtar spoke about the structure of trauma, whether acute and overwhelming or chronic and cumulative over time. Thinking of trauma as a structure, and not simply as an event, allows us then to link familiar, specific diagnostic categories to different kinds and degrees of early trauma. Psychoanalysis, in its focus on inner as well as outer realities and forces, requires the analyst to think in particular rather than general terms about the effects of trauma on a patient. Dr. Akhtar stressed the particular benefits of psychoanalysis as a method that reverses or undoes the structure of trauma by giving back good things where good things were taken away; by abstaining from doing anything bad to someone to whom bad things have been done; and by refusing to "gaslight" or engage in the kind of brainwashing denial that is often a key to traumatic harm. He also stressed the "attitude of devotion" that marks the psychoanalytic encounter and distinguishes it from other kinds of methods.

There were about thirty interested guests at the Open House, representing a variety of disciplines from medicine, psychology and social work to the humanities and education. We were thrilled to see such diversity, as it bodes well for the ongoing fertility and liveliness of psychoanalytic thought and practice in our area.

*Elaine P. Zickler, PhD, MSW  
Secretary, Task Force for Public Relations  
Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia*

## Transportation to PSPP Events

Have you had difficulty finding transportation to PSPP events in the suburbs? We can help! When signing up for PSPP events, please let the contact person know if you are either able to provide a ride or need a ride to that event. With this information, the contact person can help to make the necessary arrangements.



Dr. Phillip Bennett and Dr. Neil Altman listen reflectively to a participant's question.

## Whiteness: A Blind Spot (continued from page 1)

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Dr. Altman asks us in this paper to consider the unreflectiveness of many white people about their "whiteness." He points out that many white people regard their "whiteness" as the standard or baseline, just as many Americans similarly regard English as the standard language, not just one of many languages. As the standard, being "white," or lacking in color, makes one unique. Of course, this already represents a departure from reality in that we are all people of color, some pink, some brown, etc. Therefore "whiteness" is a state of mind that many people in our culture (white and non-white) adopt or try to adopt, in order to feel special or gain power, status, security, etc. As each new immigrant group came to this country, they tried to adopt the mindset of "whiteness" in order to acquire social and economic advantages, and to deflect suppressive treatment onto another group or groups. Altman cites the example of the early Irish immigrants who, because of their history of oppression at the hands of the British, were initially inclined to identify with black people in the United States. However, this changed as soon as they realized the advantages to identifying with the dominant "white" culture. As Altman points out, adopting racist attitudes was one way to get ahead in American society.

Altman goes on to try to deconstruct the idea of "whiteness" by describing the findings of research studies and also by citing several passages from literary works. He states that white people may need to learn about their "whiteness" from non-white people. He relates how Toni Morrison (1993 *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*) and others have pointed out how the existence of "whiteness" as an identity category depends on the existence of "blackness"; Morrison argues that one can learn about "whiteness" by looking at how black people have been portrayed in plays, novels, etc. Altman rightly points out that this is essentially the psychoanalytic method, e.g., in dream analysis, the analyst can learn things about her patient by noting the ways in which "others" are depicted/used in the patient's dreams. According to Altman, Morrison discusses the role of freedom in "whiteness," how the European immigrants came here to find freedom, but also brought with them the terror of human freedom which, in part, they managed by creating an enslaved, inferior group of people. Thus, "whiteness" came to symbolize freedom and "blackness" came to signify constraint. In Altman's view, the striving to remake oneself and be whomever one wishes is not, in itself, problematic. Rather, the problems



Ilene Dyller and Phillip Bennett muse over the recent talk.

arise when humans fail to take into account not just their human capacity for freedom but also the ways in which that freedom is limited. When constraint cannot be tolerated, it must be projected onto someone else. This, he says, is the root of oppression and slavery. (I would add to this that this is also the basis of war as well as conflict among members of a family.)

There are other negative consequences associated with “whiteness.” The lives/egos of white people become impoverished when they buy into “whiteness” and the unending search for power, privilege, safety, and security. They stop embracing risk and change, thus constricting their experience, and ironically losing their freedom. As Altman further indicates, there is also the problem of guilt—the guilt that arises when we know that we have hurt someone, and when we realize that in spite of this, we are not willing to give up our privileged positions. Using the familiar psychoanalytic concepts of projection, introjection and internalization, Altman explains how “whiteness” hurts not just the “black person” who is internalizing the projections, but also the white person who is disavowing aspects of himself. As an example of this, he relates how when people disown significant aspects of their sexuality and/or aggression, they deplete themselves of considerable vitality in the process.

Now, to turn to Altman’s clinical illustration: it is interesting that he chose to present the case of an upwardly mobile, working-class white female rather than select a black client who might have triggered more of the type of racist attitudes and conflictual countertransference that he describes in this paper. However, he does use this case example to describe how his own “whiteness” strivings prevented him for a time from being able to fully understand the patient’s feelings and conflict about his lowering his fee for her if she would accept a less desirable appointment time. After she accepted the lower fee and off-hour, she realized that she was feeling that she had put herself into a second class category by so doing. Altman’s offer had made her feel that he was giving her the choice of either accepting “second class/working class” status and paying less, or going for middle class status by paying more. To his credit, Altman admits that he was unable to help her with this constellation of feelings until he first reflected upon his own aspirations to “whiteness.”

In conclusion, in spite of his own “blind spots,” Altman has done a very respectable job of teasing apart the complex phenomenon of “whiteness” with its very human mixture of positive and negative aspects. He took on the difficult task of pulling together material



Dr. Altman delivers his talk to a curious audience.

taken from literature, sociology, economics and psychoanalysis, in order to convincingly make the point that racism still exists in America, and is perpetuated by forces that are both deeply ingrained and residing outside “the white radar screen.” Altman points out that all these disciplines reflect efforts to get some control over the forces that constrict us both personally

and culturally. He emphasizes that we will continue to need input from all of these disciplines as we struggle to raise our consciousness and transcend the brand of racism that exists in America today.

*Linda L. Guerra, PhD*



An audience member participates with animation in the discussion.

# A Report from the Division 39 Meetings in New York, April 2005

***"How we survive is crucial. . . ."***

*Robert Jay Lifton on 9/11,  
Iraq, and the shadow of Vietnam*

On April 16, as part of the meetings of Division 39, Section IX presented the Psychoanalysis for Social Responsibility Award to Robert Jay Lifton, a psychologist and prolific author whose most recent work is *Superpower Syndrome: America's Apocalyptic Confrontation with the World*.

Referring to a theme he addressed many years ago in his book *The Life of the Self*, Lifton spoke of the essential human need to have a sense of "death and the continuity of life." Each of us, he has argued, needs to have a sense that something remains after we die, whether it is in the form of a legacy of work, children, or a connection to something which transcends individual boundaries, such as nature or a spiritual ideal. We are in an age, he contends, in which the threat of mass extinction of human beings and destruction of our planet makes it vastly more difficult to maintain this sense of the continuity of life. Massive traumas, involving catastrophic loss of human life, especially at one another's hands, have made all of us into *survivors*, in the sense that the scale of these traumas tears at the basic fabric of continuity of the human project and the earth that sustains us. Specifically, he noted in this address, we Americans are all surviving the "three great traumas" of Vietnam, 9/11, and the war in Iraq. All of us, direct and indirect participants in these events, bear the "death imprint" of that which we have witnessed: the enormity of the deaths, and the peril of extinction thereby evoked, threaten the very ways we make meaning in the face of our own inevitable mortality. As such, we struggle with our need to find meaning in the "death encounter" in order to provide meaning in the rest of our life. How we survive these

traumas, how we struggle to make meaning out of our experience of being survivors, is crucial.

There are very different ways to respond to the experience of being survivors. Lifton broadly distinguishes between those modes of survival which involve a shutting down in some way, and those which involve a willingness to remain open.

Some of Lifton's earlier writings have explored ways in which human beings shut down as a way to defend against unbearable realities; in his earliest book, about the Nazi doctors, he spoke of the defense of "doubling," in which one "self" goes out each day to carry out unspeakable acts of deliberate cruelty, and another "self" returns home at night as a devoted spouse and parent. Another defense about which he has written, especially in relation to the threat of nuclear annihilation and "rapid, unmanageable social change," is that of "psychic numbing," in which we numb ourselves to substantial aspects of what we know is going on around us, and our corresponding internal experience, at considerable psychological and societal cost. A mode of surviving which Lifton addresses most in his current work is that of fundamentalism, which he explains as the vision of returning to the perfect harmony that never was. The extreme of fundamentalism is a "violent apocalypticism." The apocalyptic impulse grows out of a survivor impulse, with a vision of "renewal through destruction and purification." It is such an apocalyptic impulse, Lifton contends, which guides current American foreign policy. He sees the "war on terrorism" as an example of this apocalyptic thrust: we wage a war with an ultimate enemy, with no limits in time or space of the conflict, and with the goal of an absolute security that is, by definition, illusory. Such an approach creates more vulnerability, in what Lifton calls the "superpower syndrome."

In contrast to such closed down responses—remaining numb, or obsessed with revenge—is what Lifton

has termed the “Protean self”: one which can “open out,” leading to “the possibility of taking knowledge or wisdom from the death encounter.” The Protean self is fundamentally a “survivor self,” struggling with the assaults of trauma on the self and its interconnections. In contrast to the kinds of responses detailed above, however, the Protean self seeks new connections, pursues dialogue, and looks both to understand the meanings behind the seemingly incomprehensible traumas and to address root problems, as well as to forge new, untested pathways. This is a daunting and courageous undertaking: the Protean self is hopeful, but delicate; as a survivor self, the Protean self manifests both a “hunger for love and closeness,” and the need, on an intellectual level, to find a way to formulate what it has been through.

Lifton, in his address, challenged psychologists to embrace our roles in this cultural drama, both as therapists and as voices in the society. In the latter role, Lifton passionately argued, “it is our task as psychohistorical psychologists to distinguish what politi-

cians confound.” It is our task as psychologists and allies of the Protean self to speak directly about what it means to be survivors, and about the dangers and illusory comforts of an apocalyptic response to trauma.

A more intimate way to hear Lifton’s clear, impassioned and thoughtful analysis is as a call to seek out the Protean selves both within and in others, to connect with both the emotional and intellectual hunger that survivors of any trauma bring, and to foster the resilience that, remarkably, survives extraordinary loss and suffering. Ultimately, Lifton’s vision, which stubbornly focuses on looking at, rather than away from, violence, cruelty and terrifying loss, seems a powerfully hopeful one. Protean selves may be a bit shaky and uncertain, but the search both for meaning and for love and connection – along with the ability to tolerate their own (our own) fragile states – offers the hope of cutting a path through destructiveness and loss, and of moving forward.

*Rachel Kabasakalian-McKay, PhD*

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## Report on the Second Annual Graduate Student Brunch

For the second consecutive year, PSPP sponsored a special brunch for graduate students on May 1st. The brunch, hosted by PSPP Board Members Joe Schaller, PsyD and Phillip Bennett, PhD was extremely well attended. PSPP Members Barbara Goldsmith, PsyD and Miriam Franco, MSW, PsyD facilitated a discussion with the students about developing as a psychodynamic practitioner and the various struggles inherent in that developmental process.

Various themes emerged during the discussion, but perhaps the most salient theme that emerged concerned professional identity. Many of the students, as well as PSPP members in attendance, identified developing a professional identity as an ongoing, ambiguous process that can often raise uncertainties, regard-

less of one’s theoretical and clinical undertakings. As the students and the members discussed these issues, the importance of mentorship was highlighted, and several ideas were discussed about how PSPP might assist graduate students and early career practitioners in their transition from student to clinician. One of the products of this year’s brunch was the formation of a summer reading group for graduate students. Dr. Barbara Goldsmith and PSPP President Rachel Kabasakalian-McKay are currently co-leading a summer reading group with a small cohort of graduate students and early career professionals.

*By Matthew Whitehead, BS  
Graduate Student Representative*

# A Psychoanalytic Understanding of Aspects of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex

*Much has been written about the Oedipal myth, not least in psychoanalysis. In the following essay, Burton Seidler departs from the traditional emphasis on the tale as a metaphor for the resolution (or lack thereof) of intense early childhood conflict. Instead, he argues that the myth offers a psychological picture of the adolescent process of separation and individuation in our society.*

Myths appear to proffer truths that are often enshrouded in the secret codifications of symbolism. They are historical, yet timeless; they can be quite specific and yet, as Freud contended in his interpretation of Sophocles' Oedipus Rex myth, they can contain universal meanings and generalized truths. At the same time, myths are the formative fictions for civilizations and individuals who are a part of, and influenced by, their culture.

Let us begin with the "riddle of the Sphinx." The Sphinx is described as having the face of a woman, the body of a lion, and the wings of an eagle and is said to have confronted those who came upon it on their journey to Thebes with a riddle. If the travelers solved the riddle, they would be allowed to proceed on their way. If they did not, they would be strangled and destroyed. To be sure, this was quite a heavy toll to pay for entering Thebes. The following is the commonly accepted version of that riddle: "What is it that has one voice, goes on four legs in the morning, on two at noon, and three in the evening?" When Oedipus solves the riddle by answering "man," the Sphinx is said to have jumped off the mountain by the pass where it had been blocking the road and been smashed to smithereens on the jagged rocks at the bottom.

According to Lidz and Lidz (1986), the riddle of the Sphinx concerns the denial of the mother's importance. That is, the death of the Sphinx, among many things, may represent the death of matriarchy. The idea that this "creature" blocks the way to the coveted destination may not be terribly unlike parents who warily stand guard by their daughter against suitors who seek to make their way past her chaste quarters. In this case, it is the mother/Sphinx that blocks the way. However, one may argue that since that time, the mother has been deposed from that role and supplanted by the

dotting father, or patriarch, who determines who will have the hand of his daughter based upon what alliances can be formed, or that man's station, or matters of state and sexual proclivity, rather than former matriarchal concerns regarding fertility of the land, reproductivity, and loving care for the earth. All of us spring forth from mothers upon whom we, as humans, remain very dependent for an extended period of time in comparison with other members of the animal kingdom. Nevertheless, as part of our development, we must move from this state of dependency to independence, and eventually to interdependence. In this context, one can argue that it is the mother/Sphinx who blocks Oedipus/the budding adolescent at the crossroad to his independence and manhood. Finally, the natural process of aging returns us to dependency; we may have to rely upon a cane, hence the riddle's reference to three legs in the last stage, or evening of life.

Typically, young men do not simply *transition* out of adolescence into adulthood and away from their nuclear families. They must *break away*. Usually, this takes the form of an agitated dynamic between youth and parents, in which each party drives the other "so crazy" that each wants to kill the other. Why else would the adolescent have reason to leave the comforts of home where previously he had been nurtured, fed, and indulged in so many ways? The "man-child's" departure from the home helps mitigate against the youth's rivalrous [Oedipal] threat to his father for the mother/wife, and may help restore the balance between father and son. On one hand, this thwarts incestuous threats and potential parricide, while on the other, it avoids the possibility of castration for the youthful usurper of the mother's affections. Oedipus had been informed by the Oracle at Delphi that he was destined to kill his father and marry his mother. This is precisely why Oedipus, not knowing he had been adopted, and believing that the shepherd man and wife who had raised him as their son were his natural parents, desperately felt he must get away from them, never to return. As Fate would have it, after leaving Corinth and on the road towards Thebes, Oedipus was beset by a group traveling in the opposite direction.

They ordered him off the road and out of their way. The lead rider of the chariot hit Oedipus, who reacted in a furious rage and slew the leader and his attendants. Only one escaped to tell the story. One could put forth the argument, as Freud has, that behind every fear lays a wish. So, is it not interesting that the slain leader was none other than King Laius, Oedipus' biological father? In this same connection, Oedipus makes his way to Thebes and ultimately marries the Queen, Jocasta, presumably not knowing that she is his biological mother or that it was she, along with Laius, who gave him away to a shepherd to be tied down and left exposed on Mount Cithaeron to die. The shepherd gave Oedipus to another herdsman, Polybus, and his wife, Periboa, who had been childless. They named and raised Oedipus, which means "swollen," coming from the Greek root that means "edema," referring to the fact that his feet were tethered together and pierced when he was placed on Mount Cithaeron at his parents' behest.

The power accorded to this myth emanates not so much because it is a prized relic from an ancient esoteric culture that merely arouses our curiosity, but because it is still as vibrant, alive, and meaningful today as it once was in the past. I believe this is largely because of the depth, breadth, and relevance of this myth's symbols which has allowed it to survive the test of time. This is nowhere seen more clearly than in the repeated references in the text to various body parts. Edmunds (1985) goes to great lengths to describe the symbolic relationship between eyes and genitals, feet and genitals, as well as the significance of Oedipus' own name, and how it, too, is related to his feet/genitals. Piercing, mutilation, and castration in one form or another are persistent symbols throughout this tale and so seem to be related.

In the language of the unconscious, opposites often lie side by side. In Oedipus Rex, a great deal of polar opposites appear, forming a not so coincidental symmetry. For example, Teresias, a blind man, is coerced to reveal Oedipus' origin and identity, after which Oedipus realizes that he has murdered his father, Laius, married his mother, Jocasta, and (whether unconsciously knowing or consciously unknowing), consummated an incestuous relationship with her. After this disclosure, Oedipus breaks into Jocasta's closed chambers in a murderous, perhaps impotent, rage, and, finding that she has hanged herself, feels

impelled to blind himself. Interestingly, he unties Jocasta, lays her down, removes the brooch from her body, and proceeds to blind himself by poking out his own eyes. It is at this point that both the reader and the audience are able to see clearly in this play what Oedipus himself had previously been blind to, namely that being blind really has to do with "knowing." The root of his name, "Oed," also means "to know" (according to V. Galani, 2003, my Greek source). Even in the Old Testament, "knowing" has to do with sexuality, not just sexuality per se but carnal knowledge. As a direct result of eating the forbidden fruit of the "tree of knowledge," Adam and Eve are exiled and forever banned from returning to Paradise. Teresias is blind, yet is a seer (interesting word) who "knows" the true identity of Oedipus. Upon learning of his "unholy origins," Oedipus feels compelled to blind himself for "I cannot bear to look upon what I've done." Curiously, Oedipus is able "to know" the meaning of the feet embodied in the riddle of the Sphinx, yet he seems to have no idea what his own name represents and its relationship to "feet." In a sense, by not knowing about himself, he is able to remain "footloose" and fancy free.

It is my contention that Oedipus was reacting to unconscious libidinal striving from which he felt required to prove his manhood and establish his independence—all of which made him leave Corinth in the first place; then take on and kill King Laius and his men; and subsequently mate with Queen Jocasta. However, upon learning about who he is, and who his parents really are, why did he not merely castrate himself instead of poking out his eyes with Jocasta's brooch? By putting out his eyes, Oedipus seems to unconsciously equate eyeballs with testicles, and the blinding becomes the symbolic equivalent of castration. To this, MacMurray (1957) adds that looking is preparatory to action. It is "anticipatory touching." Therefore, Oedipus must prevent further "looking," while punishing past visual and other forays. Aside from punishing himself, it may be no mere coincidence that by blinding himself, Oedipus no longer has to look at himself and thus is spared the prospect of obtaining in-"sight" into his deeds. This is tantamount to a psychological repetition of this earlier "unknowing" state. At the same time, by blinding himself, Oedipus also unconsciously accomplishes another end, which is to render himself dependent. Previously, he married an older woman in what turned out to be an incestuous

*Continued on page 14*

# Musings on the Porch Guy and the Fee

*Steven Nisenfeld is a member of the National Organization of Forensic Social Workers, NAAP, and this fine organization. Steven Nisenfeld trained in Generalist Social Work from Temple University, holds a pending certificate in Pastoral Counseling from La Salle University, and waits for completion of the two-year certificate from The Philadelphia School of Psychoanalysis in Psychoanalytic-Psychotherapy. He is soon to retire from the Philadelphia Prison System and the City of Philadelphia where he held several positions including Program Analyst (Office of Behavioral Health), Social Work Supervisor, and Social Worker II. Prior to this employment, Steven was an Intensive Case manager with COMHAR, a community based mental health center, a psychotherapist on the inpatient substance abuse unit for incarcerates, and a psychotherapist for unsentenced and sentenced sex offenders. He also helped write the program currently utilized at The Philadelphia Industrial Correctional Center, titled "Sex Offender Behavioral Management Program." He produced a training manual for Anger Management, supervised student interns, served as a liaison for the PennyPack House school-based GED program, oversaw the intake unit at Curran Fromhold Correctional Center where some 85-100 inmates enter the prison daily, and supervised twelve social workers under his charge. He also operated a private practice, Counseling for Your Health: Alternatives to Medication. Steven avidly reads anything related to psychoanalysis, writes poetry, and one day hopes to publish a novel. Steven's special interest is in grieving families, death, dying and complicated mourning. His interest unfortunately flourished after the sudden disappearance and death of his son, Bryan Dylan Nisenfeld, while a freshman student at Roger Williams University. Though committed to psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, Steven remains true to social work and advocacy.*

I call this essay "Musings on the Porch Guy and the Fee." The idea came to me one day after either my wife or I signed the third or fourth contract addendum to our porch which included what the contractor believed to be necessities but which I construed as manipulative ways to pad the budget. For instance, placing a pitch in

the porch deck cost more, while leveling the porch was no extra. Planing and scraping the porch columns were additional, though preparing the porch floor was miscalculated and did not cost more. So I began to muse about the fee and not only how it operates in psychoanalysis, though analysts, especially neophytes, struggle with this task. I often hear inexperienced analysts cry out *Why not just state the fee up front?* instead of working through the arduous task associated with the proper handling of fee structure.

Obviously, as the bill grew, I began to wonder if parallels exist between the analysts' fee structure and the porch guy's billing practices. For instance, do analysts ever act as the porch guy does, like when he asks for more money because the wood costs more, or he didn't expect to seal the flooring material, or it took him longer to unstuck the windows he was hired to repair?

Was I, I asked myself one night in a private conversation while relaxing in the bath tub, to increase my fee: Ms. Tabloid, since I have opened your ego structure and determined its limitations and the disfigurement caused by years of superego impositions, I am forced to drastically increase my fee and, if that is not acceptable, then can we agree that I will have to work in that area for another year? I noticed, for instance, that your ego is fragmented. You are unable to discern between the object field and the ego contents. This will take awhile. How long you ask? Well, I am not able to say at this time, but I hope to have your ego reunited before the frost. If not, I will have to maybe increase the number of days we see each other, not to expedite the work but to raise enough regression that the ego starts to come together again.

The porch guy's original estimate jumped by 40% once he started to do the work. This raises another issue about the fee structure: Should inexperienced analysts be allowed to increase the fee or number of sessions because their original diagnosis failed to predict their patient's particular display of symptoms? Should new therapists who are inexperienced at diagnosis be allowed to change their assessment at a whim to make certain they are paid accordingly? The porch

guy confronts my wife when she asks about the pitch. He becomes indignant when she asks about the primer paint or wonders when the job will be completed. All fair questions.

Of course, in analysis, we can almost never provide the porch guy's type of answer. How can an analyst know when the resistances will be exhausted, when the twinship will occur or when a good join will provide more than a syntonic join? The porch guy brings in several new helpers even though his contract reads, "all work to be done by the porch guy unless otherwise specified." But he never specifies what the other guys are going to do, so we never know what to expect from them. And are they good porch guys? Is the guy we bring into our session a good analyst? Just kidding. Unless our fee includes the costs of supervision so we get help on completing the job we're hired for, then we're stuck with the hourly fee. And we're regulated by third party suppliers unless we refuse insurance. We have to accept what the carriers pay. The porch guy is not so encumbered; he can refuse to finish the work unless we pay more money. He can add on to the bill for more nails, an additional plane or level. Unfortunately, we cannot ask for more money. Nor can we ask for a percentage of the fee up front. Here is an ideal situation which I constructed while watching the television show "Curb Your Enthusiasm":

"Listen, Ms. Tabloid, your ego is severely fragmented. I have not totally assessed the situation, but I can tell that you're susceptible to narcissistic injury and that you have uncontrolled repetitive/compulsive impulses causing you to eat, drink and sleep all to excess. In addition, you have several tics, a slight stutter and have left several sessions early to avoid anxiety. With this in mind, and the nature of the work that lies ahead of us, I am requesting one third of the fees up front. I anticipate your case will last about four to eight years. A third of my fee will be \$9,500.00 approximately."

See, the porch guy can demand a third or half up front before he even starts the repairs. Then he is at liberty to request more as the work progresses and he uncovers more damage and the effects of the deliberately low initial estimate that got him hired in the first place. Our porch guy feigns importance and craftsmanship to manipulate us into providing more funds or signing additional contracts. When confronted with errors, he blames the wood or the tools. We have no

such luxury. Nor would we want to admit to the analysts that our knowledge is impaired, we forgot to account for the effects of dystonic joins and overlooked the potential for sexual and physical abuse to cause PTSD. This would not be conducive to a successful practice. Sure, we could mask the diagnosis behind Psychosis NOS, Schizophreniform Disorder, or Schizoaffective Disorder with Psychotic Features, but eventually the insurance company is going to ask for a specific ICD-9 code and we better have one ready.

The porch guy can add on for rot, water damage, broken joists, waterproofing, etc. Our hands are tied. Maybe once in a while an analyst keeps a patient around too long trying to resolve a resistance, but most often, the analyst is well-intentioned. Sure, there are some analysts who cast off patients, blaming them for having too much resistance or for fighting the transference. The porch guy, on the other hand, would never blame the homeowner. His fee is based solely on the work and its inflated estimate for completion.

The fee is an interesting phenomenon. There are many schools of thought about it. Analysts dependent upon the fee for a livelihood have been known to prolong the analysis to make money. The porch guy does not extend the work to make more money. He doesn't have to resort to this tactic. He, as I noted, just pads the bill. Is this the same thing as extending sessions to resolve resistances?—you figure that one out. Weather complicates our work, as it does for the porch guy. Cold, heat, rain, or vacation time keeps patients away from our doors. Weather curtails the porch guy's work, but he can also go inside to pick up another gig. This opportunity is seldom given to the analyst. If the patient cancels before the twenty-four hours notice period and there is no patient waiting in the wings, then we have an empty time slot—NO MONEY. NO FEE.

As I said, this is a light rambling about fees and my porch guy. Let me go outside and check on him. He hasn't been around for a while. Maybe my five o'clock is in the waiting room—if I had a five o'clock. The porch guy is picking up another side job, finishing a side job, or estimating another porch. Me, my five o'clock is a no show and I am without a patient until eight PM.

*by Steven Nisenfeld, MSW, LCSW*

## Section VIII Dissertation Grant

Section VIII, Couple and Family Therapy and Psychoanalysis, is pleased to announce a \$500 grant to support a dissertation exploring couple or family issues within a psychoanalytic or psychodynamic framework. Any doctoral student in Division 39, Division 43, or Division 44 whose dissertation proposal has been approved is eligible to apply. The deadline for submitting your application is February 1, 2006.

To apply, send three (3) copies of a letter describing the proposal and its relationship to the section's interests, and proof that the proposal has been approved. Address letters to Gerald Stechler, Ph.D., 18 Whittier Rd., Lexington, MA 02420. Inquiries may be emailed to [stechler@bu.edu](mailto:stechler@bu.edu).

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### Oedipus Rex (continued from page 11)

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relationship. Now, he must be dependent (perhaps again, or at least in a more obvious way) upon other kin, namely his daughter, Antigone (and, later, Ismene). Oedipus, by his own earlier edict, must either die or be exiled. He chooses exile. Here, in the evening

of his life, he must travel the road as a lame, blind beggar, solely supported by kin (and cane). Hence the riddle of the Sphinx comes full circle.

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by Burton N. Seitler, PhD

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# Some Programs of Interest to the PSPP Community

NOTE: Much of the information for this calendar was obtained from the website for the Alliance for Psychoanalytic Thought at [www.philanalysis.org](http://www.philanalysis.org)

*September, 2005*

**C.E. Seminar: Kleinian Perspectives on Psychoanalytic Therapy**, led by Paul Koehler, MSW, sponsored by PSCSW and the International Psychotherapy Institute. Seminar will be offered at four separate times starting in September: Wednesday mornings 9:30-noon (Chestnut Hill), Tuesday mornings 9:30-noon (Chestnut Hill), Friday afternoons 1-3:30 (Doylestown), and Saturday mornings, 9:00-11:30. Seminars will each meet for 10 sessions, for 25 CE hours. For further information or copy of brochure, call Paul at (215) 345-8730

*Saturday, September 10*

**Gestalt Therapy Institute of Philadelphia: *Dealing with Major Loss: A Gestalt Therapy Approach to Grieving and Healing of Trauma.*** **Presenters:** Mary Lou Schack & David Henrich. All day program in Bryn Mawr. CEU's available for Psychologists; approval from other boards is pending. Sponsored by the Gestalt Therapy Institute of Philadelphia. For more information, call 610-519-1300 or check out the website <http://www.gestaltphila.org/>.

*Sunday, September 11*

**Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia Book Fair:** 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. History, Literature, The Arts, Philosophy, Humanities, Social Sciences and Children's Books, as well as everything about

Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis. Best selection before noon, then prices reduced. Held at: Rockland, East Fairmount Park, 3810 Mt. Pleasant Drive, Philadelphia. 215-235-2345 (Map at web site [www.philanalysis.org](http://www.philanalysis.org)) . NO DEALERS

*Friday, September 23:*

**PSPP Fall Dinner Meeting:** Susan Levine, LCSW, BCD will deliver a paper entitled: "Nothing but the Truth: Self-disclosure and the Persona of the Analyst". The dinner meeting will be held at the Evviva restaurant on Montgomery Ave. in Narberth. For further information, please visit the PSPP website, or contact Rachel Kabasakalian-McKay at [rkmckay@earthlink.net](mailto:rkmckay@earthlink.net).

*Friday, October 28*

**Gestalt Therapy Institute of Philadelphia *Healing Drama: Narcissism and the Love Relationship.*** All day program in Bryn Mawr. CEU's available for Psychologists; approval from other boards is pending. Sponsored by the Gestalt Therapy Institute of Philadelphia. For more information, call 610-519-1300 or check out the website <http://www.gestaltphila.org/>

*Saturday, November 5*

**aPt Ethics Workshop:** *More details to follow.* **Presenter:** Steven Samuel, Ph.D. **Time and location:** Morning program at Rockland, 3810 Mt. Pleasant Drive, Philadelphia, PA. Sponsored by the Alliance for Psychoanalytic Thought.

## PSPP Website

Please check out our website at [www.pspp.org](http://www.pspp.org)

Also, we have a new "opt-out" listserve to facilitate exchange of information among members. Subscription to the listserve is an automatic benefit of membership. If you would like to unsubscribe, simply follow the instructions at the end of each email.

## Classified Ads

### Office Space: Bala Cynwyd

Office space available for part-time sublet in Bala Cynwyd. Large, sunny office in professional building with many psychotherapists. Contact Jeanine Vivona, PhD at 215-570-4947 or Ellen Balze, PhD at 215-519-4056.

### Office Space: Bala Cynwyd

Bala Cynwyd office for sublet. Spacious enough for individuals, couples, or group. Large windows, shared waiting room in quiet building. Easily accessible to public transportation. Office available up to half time. Please call or email: ruthsteinman@hotmail.com or 610-667-7911.

### Office Space: Center City

Lovely Center City/Art Museum area office space available in first floor suite. Large windows look out on Ben Franklin Parkway. Please contact Rachel Kabasakalian-McKay at 610-660-9887 or rkmckay@earthlink.net

### Office Space: Center City

Center City Psychotherapy Office Space, Rittenhouse Square Area – Attractive, warmly furnished psychotherapy suite, including window with nice view, spacious waiting room, kitchenette and two exits for extra privacy and security, is available to sublet on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays beginning September 1st, 2005. Building is well-maintained, has handicapped access and is convenient to public transportation. Contact Linda Guerra, PhD at 215-545-7009.

### Office Space: Rittenhouse Square

Office Space available in six-office suite on Rittenhouse Square. On-site discounted parking available. Call Cindy Baum-Baicker, PhD 215-568-5100.

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