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Queering Psychoanalysis: The Relational Turn

Jack Drescher

SUNY Downstate Medical Center

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QUEERING PSYCHO- ANALYSIS: THE RELATIONAL TURN

BY JACK
DRESCHER, MD

On Thursday, March 25, CLAGS hosted a panel entitled "Queering Psychoanalysis: The Relational Turn." The program, part of an ongoing CLAGS effort, introduced academics and scholars more familiar with Freud and Lacan to contemporary, relational psychoanalytic theories and practices.

CLAGS Board member, Jack Drescher, M.D., moderated the panel. The first speaker was David Schwartz, Ph.D., a psychoanalyst on the editorial boards of *The Journal of Gay and Lesbian Psychotherapy* and *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society*. Schwartz presented a paper entitled, "Reparative Therapy for a Pathological History, or How Psychoanalysis Might Keep You Queer, Even If You Have Inner Conflict." Schwartz traced the origins of relational psychoanalytic theories to Freud's close associate, Sándor Ferenczi, sometimes known as "the mother of psychoanalysis." Schwartz touched upon the heterosexist and antihomosexual underpinnings of traditional drive theory (referred to by relational analysts as one-person psychology) and contrasted them with the mutuality of what relational analysts refer to as two-person theories.

The next speaker was Ann D'Ercole, Ph.D., Clinical Associate Professor of Psychology, and a Supervisor at the New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis. D'Ercole presented a paper on "Feminist and Queer Contributions to Relational Psychoanalysis." D'Ercole chronicled the influence of feminist thinkers on psychoanalysis. The feminist critique from the second wave of feminism to the 1980s led to a reformulation of many cherished psychoanalytic concepts. Feminist cultural criticism provided early formulations of sexual fluidity, mutuality and influence, and the importance of early infant attachments on gender performance. These feminist influences would eventually be incorporated in developing relational psychoanalytic modes that are more democratic, more mutual and queerer.

Eric Sherman, L.C.S.W., then presented "A Clinical Vignette: Big Boys Don't Cry." Sherman is a psychoanalyst and author of the recently released *Notes from the Margins: The Gay Analyst's Subjectivity in the Treatment Setting*. He presented a case from his book of his treatment of an effeminate gay man whose self presentation Sherman found annoying. Sherman demonstrated how contemporary analysts work within the countertransference by illustrating how he came to understand that part of the reason he felt annoyed with the patient was that he unconsciously identified with the man's sense of shame. Sherman's understanding, and his sharing some of it with his patient, allowed the treatment to move forward in unexpected ways.

The discussant was Catherine Silver, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and a psychoanalyst trained at National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis (NPAP). In response to Schwartz, Silver noted that Freud's ideas about fluidity of libido, multiple objects of attachments, bisexuality in infants and the role of trauma create a sense of

mourning in both gays and heterosexuals regarding the loss of part of their sexuality. Referring to D'Ercole's presentation, she agreed that the postwar history of feminist thought about gender points to greater emphasis on interpersonal and intersubjective concerns and a clearer distinction between sex, gender and sexuality. Finally, she underscored how analysis of transferences and countertransferences allowed Sherman to gradually identify with his patient, despite

early attempts at emotional distancing. This allowed a deep expressive connection to develop between them without denying the Other's difference. ♦

Jack Drescher, MD is Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at State University of New York – Downstate, and a Training and Supervising Analyst at the William Alanson White Institute.



From left to right, Jack Drescher, Ann D'Ercole, David Schwartz, and Eric Sherman