

Engage in Personal Therapy

To my mind, personal psychotherapy is, by far, the most important part of psychotherapy training. Question: What is the therapist's most valuable instrument? Answer (and no one misses this one): the therapist's own self. I will discuss the rationale and the technique of the therapist's use of self from many perspectives throughout this text. Let me begin by simply stating that therapists must show the way to patients by personal modeling. We must demonstrate our willingness to enter into a deep intimacy with our patient, a process that requires us to be adept at mining the best source of reliable data about our patient—our own feelings.

Therapists must be familiar with their own dark side and be able to empathize with all human wishes and impulses. A personal therapy experience permits the student therapist to experience many aspects of the therapeutic process from the patient's seat: the tendency to idealize the therapist, the yearning for dependency, the gratitude toward a caring and attentive listener, the power granted to the therapist. Young therapists

must work through their own neurotic issues; they must learn to accept feedback, discover their own blind spots, and see themselves as others see them; they must appreciate their impact upon others and learn how to provide accurate feedback. Lastly, psychotherapy is a psychologically demanding enterprise, and therapists must develop the awareness and inner strength to cope with the many occupational hazards inherent in it.

Many training programs insist that students have a course of personal psychotherapy: for example, some California graduate psychology schools now require sixteen to thirty hours of individual therapy. That's a good start—but only a start. Self-exploration is a lifelong process, and I recommend that therapy be as deep and prolonged as possible—and that the therapist enter therapy at many different stages of life.

My own odyssey of therapy, over my forty-five-year career, is as follows: a 750-hour, five-time-a-week orthodox Freudian psychoanalysis in my psychiatric residency (with a training analyst in the conservative Baltimore Washington School), a year's analysis with Charles Rycroft (an analyst in the "middle school" of the British Psychoanalytic Institute), two years with Pat Baumgartner (a gestalt therapist), three years of psychotherapy with Rollo May (an interpersonally and existentially oriented analyst of the William Alanson White Institute), and numerous briefer stints with therapists from a variety of disciplines, including behavioral therapy, bioenergetics, Rolfing, marital-couples work, an ongoing ten-year (at this writing) leaderless support group of male therapists, and, in the 1960s, encounter groups of a whole rainbow of flavors, including a nude marathon group.

Note two aspects of this list. First, the *diversity of approaches*. It is important for the young therapist to avoid sectarianism and to gain an appreciation of the strengths of all the varying thera-

generally profits even more from a "stranger" experiential group or, better yet, an ongoing high-functioning psychotherapy group. Only by being a member of a group can one truly appreciate such phenomena as group pressure, the relief of catharsis, the power inherent in the group-leader role, the painful but valuable process of obtaining valid feedback about one's interpersonal presentation. Last, if you are fortunate enough to be in a cohesive, hardworking group, I assure you that you will never forget it and will endeavor to provide such a therapeutic group experience for your future patients.