

Colloquium Series Presentation: Review of Mark J. Blechner, PhD “Psychoanalysis and Sexual Issues”

On May 2nd, 2010 at the NYU Kimmel Center, Mark J. Blechner, PhD presented a case at a colloquium for Manhattan Institute on the topic of “Psychoanalysis and Sexual Issues”. Dr. Blechner is a Training and Supervising Analyst at the William Alanson White Institute and is on the faculties of the Manhattan Institute for Psychoanalysis and New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis. In addition, he is Editor-in-Chief of the journal Contemporary Psychoanalysis. He has published three books: Sex Changes: Transformations in Society and Psychoanalysis (Routledge, 2009), The Dream Frontier (Analytic Press, 2001) and Hope and Mortality (Analytic Press, 1997).

Dr. Blechner’s presentation examined the theme of the erotic mind and how an analyst’s judgment of a patient’s sexual desire and behavior may have an impact on the treatment.

He presented a case of a 33-year-old man whom he described as a voyeur. This patient was very technologically sophisticated, which permitted him an uncanny ability to look into his female victims’ apartments. The point of his voyeurism was to see naked women against their will. Dr. Blechner explored the various meanings of this behavior with the patient and emphasized repetitive components of it from the patient’s history, while not losing sight of the aggressive aspects of it, describing the behavior as a way for the patient “to rape with his eyes”.

Themes about the patient’s past were explored in connection to his voyeuristic desires, and focused on an exploration of how early significant relationships in the patient’s life may have played a role in the development of his voyeuristic behavior. Furthermore, elements of shame and aggressivity were examined in some detail for their relevance to his voyeuristic wishes and behavior.

In addition to exploring the patient’s past significant relationships, Dr. Blechner also explored how a past therapist had been judgmental of the patient’s voyeuristic behavior, going as far as calling his behavior “disgusting”. Dr. Blechner explored his own countertransference and used it to understand the patient’s need, rather than judging him for what seemed to be a non-threatening aggressive type of behavior.

However, the patient then began to bring the voyeurism to the next level and began to threaten a woman he had been watching by calling her and telling her that he was going to go to her apartment. Dr. Blechner explained that he then felt it necessary to intervene and told him that he could not do such a thing and asked him to stop the voyeurism for three months while increasing sessions to three times per week. Dr. Blechner stated that many memories and emotions began to surface of the patient’s mother and her boyfriend that ultimately seemed to help the patient manage his impulse of voyeuristic behavior.

Dr. Blechner recognized that what ultimately helped this patient create change was his lack of judgment, careful monitoring his countertransference reactions, and focus on trying to engage the patient in inquiring into the meanings of his wishes and behaviors. He wondered whether oftentimes in dealing with sexual issues in analytic work, it is helpful to try to recognize and differentiate from what society may deem “perverted”.

Following the case presentation, a lively discussion ensued where audience members inquired about various aspects of a patient’s sexual experiences and analysts’ countertransferential responses.

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