

Comment to Rabin

Mark W. Baker, PhD

The La Vie Center, Pasadena, California

Herbert Rabin's (1995) article "The Liberating Effect on the Analyst of the Paradigm Shift in Psychoanalysis" was a refreshing and insightful look at the continuing paradigm shift from a one-person to a two-person psychology being experienced in psychoanalysis today. I was especially impressed with Rabin's vulnerable confession of the personal distress this shift has brought about in his professional life and how this might help explain the resistance to this same shift in the theoretical orientations of our colleagues.

In an otherwise outstanding article, Rabin unfortunately drew one conclusion that was based on an incomplete understanding of intersubjectivity theory. He stated,

In contrast, the kind of error more likely to be made from an intersubjective perspective, with its roots in self psychology, is exemplified by misunderstanding idealization reactions to the analyst as developmental needs, when in fact the function of the idealizing statements is to defend against hostile aggression. (p. 475)

Although intersubjectivity theory, which has had a separate line of development from self psychology, does not see all idealizing statements as defenses against aggression, defensive idealization is specifically addressed by the concept of the defensive self ideal (Stolorow, Brandchaft, & Atwood, 1987). One instance of the defensive self ideal is when the patient makes use of idealizing statements toward the therapist that do not have their roots in unmet developmental idealization longings. Instead, the patient experiences the therapist as the embodiment of the self ideal that the patient wishes to achieve but falls painfully short of at the present time. Sitting across the room from one's self ideal under these conditions arouses feelings of shame and envy that are readily evocative of a restitutive rage (Stolorow, 1986). According to intersubjectivity theory, this is a manifestation of an attempt

to counteract an intolerable sense of defectiveness, and this is actually indicative of walled-off mirroring longings as opposed to idealization longings.

To aid in the differential diagnosis of these two types of idealization statements from patients, I ask myself the question, "How does the patient feel being in my presence when statements of idealization are being made?" If the patient is comforted and soothed, facilitating greater self-exploration, then I tend to understand that the idealizing dimension of the transference is in the forefront of the patient's experience. If the patient is not comforted or distanced by my being so ideal or attempting to offer a "false self" (Winnicott, 1965) connection to me, then I tend to look for feelings of inadequacy resulting from crushed strivings for expansiveness and mirroring longings, and I understand the idealization statements to be defensive.

REFERENCES

- Rabin, H. (1995). The liberating effect on the analyst of the paradigm shift in psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Psychology, 12*, 467-481.
- Stolorow, R. (1986). Narcissistic rage. *Psychiatric Annals, 16*, 489-490.
- Stolorow, R., Brandchaft, B., & Atwood, G. (1987). *Psychoanalytic treatment: An intersubjective approach*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press.
- Winnicott, D. (1965). *The maturational processes and the facilitating environment*. London: Hogarth.