

**SOME REFLECTIONS ON
“WHAT IS A PSYCHOANALYTIC RELATIONSHIP?” AND
“HOW DOES IT EFFECTUATE CHANGE?”**

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Revolutionary changes have been occurring within psychoanalysis over the past three decades, requiring us to readdress the issues of “What is a psychoanalytic relationship?” and “How does it effectuate change?” The purpose of this paper is to share some reflections on these two issues.

Emblematic of the changes occurring in psychoanalysis is the portrayal of conflict between analyst and analysand in the movie *Analyze This*. Billy Crystal, playing a respected psychoanalyst, attempts to begin the analysis of Robert De Niro, as a Mob Boss, in a technically proper and orderly fashion. According to the rules of his trade, Billy Crystal had learned that his job is to get his patient to associate freely, to objectively interpret De Niro’s problems, and to be drawn into the human interaction as little as possible. As the Mob Boss, De Niro wants help, straight talk, contact, and, as it evolves, a protective, caring relationship. With their disparate agendas, De Niro and Crystal are heading for conflict from the first moments of their first encounter. Crystal is conducting a session with a married couple when De Niro’s burly bodyguard bursts in, demanding that Crystal see his boss, now! Crystal tries to maintain some decorum, but within minutes finds his couple hurriedly exiting and himself, somewhat bewildered, facing, of course, the Mob Boss. The comic tension builds. De Niro pushes and stretches his analyst every step of the way, forcing Crystal to come out from behind his “objective” screen and to be the person he needs him to be. Crystal nervously, but with determination, tries to hold on to a semblance of his analytic stance. Perhaps most representative of their precarious negotiations is the scene in which, in his patient’s luxurious hotel room, Crystal with exasperation instructs De Niro that it would be

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helpful for him to express his anger: "Go ahead, express it, take it out on the pillow." De Niro, at first with reluctance, then with a wild, enthusiastic abandon, empties his revolver, shooting the pillow, feathers flying every where, and exclaiming at the end of his feat, "Doc, you're right. That does feel better!" Not exactly what his analyst had in mind, but it would do.

For more than a hundred years, psychoanalysts have puzzled over how psychoanalysis effectuates therapeutic change. Freud initially thought that rendering the unconscious conscious was central for change and, with that goal in mind, developed the technique of asking the patient to associate as freely as possible. The analyst's principle communication became that of interpretation—to make the unconscious conscious, to engender insight. Interpretation focused principally on the revelation of intrapsychically-generated dynamics, unconscious wishes and fantasies, emphasizing the recovery of the repressed. The analyst delivered interpretations as an objective, neutral observer, without affective participation.

Freud, however, was on occasion even more convinced of the importance of the relationship as promoting psychoanalytic change (Friedman, 1978). In 1916, Freud said, "What turns the scale is not intellectual insight, but the relationship to the doctor" (p. 445); and declared in 1937 that the analyst must be a "model" as well as a "teacher" (p. 248). In keeping with this emphasis, another lineage of psychoanalysts focused on the relational experience as central to therapeutic change. Spearheading this relational thrust, Ferenczi (1953, 1955) asserted, "The physician's love heals the patient." Emphasizing love (Suttie, 1935; Balint, 1952, 1968), the holding environment (Winnicott, 1965), new object experience (Loewald, 1960), and mirroring and idealizing selfobject transferences (Kohut, 1971, 1977, 1984) broadened the range and focus of the analyst's responses far beyond interpretation of unconscious, and primarily intrapsychically-generated, fantasies and conflicts and powerfully effected the communicative exchange.

Over the past thirty years, remarkable changes have been taking place within psychoanalysis that I will only briefly allude to. First, the paradigmatic change from positivistic to relativistic science dethroned the analyst from an elevated position of objectivity and facilitated recognition that the analyst is a full participant, together with the patient, in the co-construction of the analytic relationship. This fundamental philosophical shift, regardless of the analyst's communicative tone or the patient's construction, made clear that interpretations are the analyst's suggested organizations of the data, not objective "truths."

In understanding trauma and his patients' unconscious conflicts,