

VIOLENCE AND AGGRESSION IN THE CONSULTING ROOM

**A Roundtable Discussion with
*Sue Grand, PhD, Joseph Newirth, PhD, and Abby Stein, PhD***

Moderated by: *Art Baur, LCSW, Sheldon Itzkowitz, PhD, ABPP,
Deborah Pines, LCSW, Alan Sirote, LCSW, and Mary Sussillo, LCSW, BCD*

Introduction:

Sheldon Itzkowitz, PhD, ABPP

The editors of *Psychoanalytic Perspectives* were shocked by the death of Kathryn Faughey in New York in the spring of 2008. The senseless murder caused all of us—and, in fact, the entire psychological community—to wonder about the safety of therapists everywhere. Most of us practice in private offices where there is no protection from forces beyond our control. Even an angry patient, in the aftermath of Faughey's death, causes many of us to wonder if we are safe enough.

The psychoanalyst knows all too well that evil lurks not in the hearts of men, but in the deepest, darkest recesses of the mind. It is the contemporary psychoanalyst who endeavors to enter, along with his or her patient, the world of unconscious fantasy and reverie and to confront the patient's inner demons. It is in this process that patient and analyst face the dark side of humanity: anger, lust, desire, envy, jealousy, and at times, murderous rage.

The idea for this Roundtable on Violence and Aggression in the Consulting Room occurred to me when I was enjoying a wonderful lunch at one of Manhattan's great Italian restaurants. Joining me that day were friends and colleagues who would be on a panel with me at the Spring 2008 Conference of the Division of Psychoanalysis (Division 39) of the American Psychological Association. Our meeting was just a couple of weeks after the brutal murder of Dr. Kathryn Faughey, the psychologist who was stabbed to death in her office on New York's Upper East Side. I began describing the patient whom I would be presenting who suffers from Dissociative Identity Disorder, and her system of alter-personalities. As I described the persecutory, perpetrating alter

who forces the patient to hurt herself and will hurt others if necessary, I became aware of an icy chill washing over me. It was only then that I realized how physically alone I am with my patients. How can I protect myself against an enraged, out-of-control alter who, for whatever reason, might perceive me as a threat? Who would be there to help me? Clearly part of what I was feeling had to relate to the dynamics of the case. But the reaction of fear came directly from the murder of Dr. Faughey. I was struck by the fact that I had been working with this patient for more than a year and a half, and not until that day did I feel that I was working with someone who could potentially be dangerous.

To what extent do therapists deny or dissociate patients' potential for aggression or violence to maintain the therapeutic relationship? How do we conceptualize aggression or violence? Are they similar constructs, or are they different? What happened to Dr. Faughey was the extreme of person-to-person violence: premeditated, out-of-control, and unchecked. I think it's probably fair to assume that most therapists do not see patients with such potential for violence in their private offices. The violence and aggression that we are most often confronted with tends to be intrapsychic and acted out in cutting, self-starvation, depression, or an extreme masochistic form of relatedness. The interpersonal nature of the aggression we are confronted with frequently occurs in the context of enactments and intense transference reactions. However, there are extraordinary circumstances where violence itself is acted out before our eyes.

We decided that this Roundtable would be not only a timely topic but a meaningful way to honor the memory of a fallen colleague. As such, we searched and researched the topic and came up with a group of eminent scholars in the field. They are all psychoanalysts who have written about violence in our community and can enlighten us with their thoughts and feelings on the issue. They have all written books on the subject that are widely read in the psychoanalytic world.

Sue Grand, PhD, is a faculty member and supervisor at the NYU Post-Doctoral Program in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy; a faculty member of the Steven Mitchell Center for Relational Psychoanalysis; a faculty member of the Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California; associate editor of *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*; and author of *The Reproduction of Evil: A Clinical and Cultural Perspective*. Dr. Grand is in private practice in New York City and in Teaneck, New Jersey.

Abby Stein, PhD, is the author of numerous articles on child maltreatment, criminal-psych mythology, and states of consciousness during violent crime. Her book, *Prologue to Violence: Child Abuse, Dissociation, and Crime* (reviewed on page 67), showcases her groundbreaking research with violent felons. Dr. Stein completed a post-doctoral fellowship at the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and Psychology in 2008 and is an associate professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, where she has won many awards for her innovative teaching.

Joseph Newirth, PhD, is a professor at the Derner Institute of Advanced Psychological Studies at Adelphi University and the former director of the post-doctoral program there. Dr. Newirth is on the faculty of the NYU Post-Doctoral Program and the National Institute for the Psychotherapies. His recent book is *Between Emotion and Cognition: The Generative Unconscious*. Dr. Newirth is in private practice in New York City and in Great Neck.

The members of the *Perspectives* staff who joined the group to provide questions were:

Sheldon Itzkowitz, PhD, ABPP, is a former editor and now an associate editor at *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*; Supervisor at the NYU Post-Doctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis and the National Institute for the Psychotherapies, and president of the Division of Psychoanalysis of the New York State Psychological Association. He is in private practice in New York City.

Art Baur, LCSW, is on the faculty at the Derner Institute of Advanced Psychological Studies at Adelphi and a supervisor and faculty member at the National Institute for the Psychotherapies. He is in private practice in New York City.

Alan Sirote, LCSW, is a faculty member and supervisor at the National Institute for the Psychotherapies and the Manhattan Institute for Psychoanalysis and also on the faculty of the Institute for Contemporary Psychotherapy. He is in private practice in Queens and Manhattan.

Deborah Pines, LCSW, is the editor of *Psychoanalytic Perspectives* and co-chair of the Candidates Committee of the International Association of Relational Psychoanalysts and Psychotherapists. She is in private practice in New York City.

Mary Sussillo, LCSW, BCD, is a former editor and now associate editor of *Psychoanalytic Perspectives*. She is director of the Center for Bereavement in New York City and runs groups for those who have lost loved ones. She is a supervisor and adjunct faculty member at the National Institute for the Psychotherapies. In addition, she is in private practice in New York City.

Art Baur: Many years ago, a 17-year-old boy, accompanied . . .