Amygdala and Music

From: law and psychology discussion list [mailto:PSYLAW-L@listserv.unl.edu] On Behalf Of Tyler Carpenter Sent: 14 June, 2008 11:52 To: PSYLAW-L@listserv.unl.edu Subject: Re: Deadly Therapy

Make my copy leather-bound and signed, Michael.

Fascinating effort that more a few will find deeply satisfying. Martin Luther believed fervently in the power of music to take us to such exalted places of the soul and in the course of trying to make a practical vehicle to get good German Protestants there on Sundays (as well as support all those children), J. S. Bach devised the heavenly cantata to speak deeply to our limbic systems and reinforce the weekly Bible reading and sermon on its theme. Sometimes that's as close as humans can get and not a bad reason and way to live.

Thanks for sharing, Michael. Best, Tyler J.Tyler Carpenter, Ph.D., FAACP PO Box 366063 Hyde Park, MA 02136-0019

Date: Sat, 14 Jun 2008 11:20:13 -0600 From: mckarson@MSN.COM Subject: Re: Deadly Therapy To: PSYLAW-L@listserv.unl.edu Here are two, one from the chapter on science and one from the co-written chapter on critical thinking.

Michael

Chapter 8. Is Science Just Another Party Line?

[Science is a] verbal community especially concerned with verbal behavior which contributes to successful action. B. F. Skinner, Verbal Behavior, p. 418

What people understand to be the organization of their experience, they buttress, and perforce, self-fulfilling. They develop a corpus of cautionary tales, games, riddles, experiments, newsy stories, and other scenarios which elegantly confirm a frame-relevant view of the workings of the world.

Erving Goffman, Frame Analysis, p. 563

Since so much depends on how situations are defined, can't we appeal to some objective method for saying which frame is fundamental, for telling us how things really stand? Science could potentially play that role for us, but the obstacles facing the therapist's quest for objectivity also interfere with

the scientist's. There are many reasons to use science to resolve disputes about how to define what's going on, but because it's practiced by human beings, it's rife with power dynamics, self-serving concepts, and performance quandaries.

Science is a human subculture with traditions, norms, and conventions that tend to resolve disputes about the nature of reality accurately. Science is about geographical reality, but science itself is all-too-human. Science happens in a social world, even though it attempts to abstract information about the world beyond social conventions. Science is talk about reality. Because science is a social phenomenon-though it may pretend not to be-it is political, and per formative.

Oppressive Knowledge

Let's face it-none of us want scientists to be right about everything. None of us want to learn, proof positive, that consciousness is an illusion, that there is no life after death, and that we are descended from slime. But none of us has to accept these things, either-we can just dispute the evidence or the argument that leads to conclusions we don't like. We can acknowledge scientists' ability to control and predict what spacecraft will do but question their ideas about where the galaxy came from. We smirk when a spacecraft explodes (when there's no one in it) because it firms up our sense that they don't know it all, and that our own pet theory of how the universe came to be is just as valid as theirs. (I personally think the universe has all the earmarks of an afterthought.)

There is one branch of science (meaning, one area of scientific investigation) where we especially rebel against their reducing everything to rules and equations-psychology, the science of human behavior. Nobody likes a smart aleck, but nobody especially likes an aleck being smart about us. In writing this book that you are reading right now (see how annoying it is that I know what you're doing?), I'm trying to be smart about us. We're afraid that self-knowledge will reduce us to machinery. But rather than console myself with the thought that such a reduction is impossible (by dint of my godliness, will, aesthetic appreciation, or creativity), I instead believe that if this is my condition, I must learn to enjoy it-transcendence through facticity is my goal, not transcendence by denying facticity.

This is all by way of saying that the truth about reality may be upsetting. "For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (Ecclesiastes 1:18).

Scientific statements can become a party line to protect the scientific establishment and to protect the average Joe from sorrow. Darwin anticipated the use of scientific statements as a form of complacency when he wrote, "If the misery of our poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin" (used by Gould, 1981, as an epigraph).

Darwin was trying to stave off the political use of his theory of natural selection, anticipating that it would be twisted to justify bad treatment of the poor. Within science itself, statements about reality can turn into a party line that preserves the power of the scientific establishment by shutting down new ideas and information. Scientific hegemony produces the oft-heard locutions, scientific evidence and scientific fact, where the adjective adds nothing but an aura of respectability.

Cultural Myths of Science

The ultimate scientific fantasy is to be the little boy in The Emperor's New Clothes (Andersen, 1837). The story is about clever tailors who dupe a vain Emperor and his courtiers, and ultimately the public, into believing that the non-existent material with which they are weaving the royal outfit is so fine and elegant that only intelligent and competent people can see it. Everyone claims to see this remarkable material. In my own version of this story, everyone does see the material, since the existence of the object is only one factor in determining what is seen, and the expectations, wishes, and status concerns of the observer are also important factors in determining what is seen. Observers' concern for their own social status ties them to the Emperor's status, whose nakedness requires a level of tact that defies the senses. Then, a little boy, immune to this need for status by virtue of his youth and naiveté, not to mention a degree of insolence and rebelliousness often found in those who, unable to ascend the status ladder, prefer to upend it, says, "But he's naked." Even though the Emperor and his immediate entourage go on pretending that he is dressed, his social-political power can't withstand the effect of this geographical truth, and the people see him for what he is. The scientific fantasy is the triumph of geographical truth over social and political constructions.

In a way, the little boy illustrates the fantasy of every human subculture, namely, to impose and ascend one's preferred status ladder (which in science's case is accuracy about reality), replacing and upending that of the dominant culture. It's partly sour grapes-looks are unimportant, say the unlovely, and money is unimportant, say the unwealthy. But it's more than that. The unimportance of looks or money may be a genuine value in a given subculture, and the members of this subculture will take a certain delight in pointing to public figures for whom money did not buy happiness or whose good looks proved more a curse than a blessing.

Science Avoids Performance

In science, the highest value is accuracy about reality, but this value unfolds in a larger culture that has competing values-maintaining a social hierarchy, for example, or protecting the accuracy of religious accounts of reality. When a scientist can state a geographical truth that upends one of these values in the larger culture, she is in the same position as the journalist who gains the respect of her peers by exposing a political leader's sordid past.

The scientist's political problem can be summarized by this example about communist China's agronomists: "Mao personally redesigned China's agricultural techniques, specifying closer planting and deeper sowing to increase yields. Rice planted so closely together could not grow, but party officials, anxious to please Mao, staged shows of agricultural . . . success" (Harford, 2005, p. 221). The phrase, "staged shows," is particularly apt, and demonstrates how hard it is for scientists-just like the rest of us-to behave non-performatively.

Science's commitment to an accurate account of reality is not uniform, wholehearted, or exclusive of all other motives. No subculture can claim that kind of devotion. But science is persistently committed to this value. When R.A. Fisher, a biologist and mathematician, demonstrated that one of biology's most revered figures, Gregor Mendel, fudged his data to make it look more convincing, many scientists suffered a pang of regret on Mendel's and science's behalf, but no one thought that Fisher should have kept quiet. When church figures or statesmen are caught with their pants down, there is always some question about whether to publish-in science, the truth about reality is the ultimate (if not always the only) goal.

The Fantasy of Objectivity

Science is practiced by people, but it's often presented as if there is a pure science, a sort of Platonic ideal, that could in theory be distilled to its purest form but in practice is corrupted by the psychologies, motivations, needs, and imperfections of humans. This is balderdash, since without people, all our foibles included perforce, there would be no science. The fantasy of a pure science is rooted in the deeper human desire to define ourselves by what we're proud of, ignoring the rest or seeing the rest as an appendage to the otherwise perfect self. The Red Sox did not win the World Series between 1918 and 2004, while the Yankees won over 20 times, but a Red Sox fan still thinks that the Red Sox are the best team in baseball history, thwarted only by the fact that the Yankees have had more money and spent that money on acquiring better players. Apart from money, the Red Sox are better. Apart from my body, I am a better athlete than Carl Lewis. Apart from people, science is an engine for discovering the truth. But as Yeats said, who can know the dancer from the dance?

[From Chapter 9]

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism can be productively thought of as a further set of questions asked of any proposition. If a proposition asserts something about people, does their race or sex matter? Does the proponent's or audience's race or sex matter? What about identified culture, ethnicity, gender, class, income, target status, stigmatized identity, or expectations of others based on one of these factors? A proposition like, "Good supervision makes therapists better"

seems to stand apart from factors of race or sex. Multicultural sensitivity reminds us to ask if these matter.

Critical Thinking Can Be Upsetting

Since critical thinking lends itself to status moves and power plays, it often comes off as contemptuous. Even at its nicest, critical thinking communicates that the proponent's proposition won't be accepted at face value. To a large extent, we are all invested in face (Goffman, 1959), and critical thinking discredits any attempt to perform an oracular or authoritative face-think of doctors who won't deign to discuss evidence, even when it supports their conclusions. If there is a shared understanding that pronouncements are tentative, revisable, and makeshift, critical thinking is playful and collaborative. Otherwise, it's upsetting.

For one kind of faith tradition, critical thinking attacks faith. Such faith is factual, not spiritual-faith that such-and-such happened, or that scriptural accounts of events are literally true. Another kind of faith, faith in how we should live, or faith in facts that are not subject to observation, has no problem with critical thinking. Galileo said that faith should concern itself with how to go to Heaven, and not with how the Heavens go. When faith addresses the latter, critical thinking undermines it.

Critical thinking involves asking what if. People sometimes link words and facts so intimately that they can't play what if. "Some philosophers seem to be angry with images for not being things, and with words for not being feelings" (Santayana, 1922, p. 131). How would you feel if you were arrested for child molesting? Some people respond, "I would never do such a thing." Critical thinking can upset people by pushing them to imagine possibilities when all they want is certainty about reality.

It's comforting to have some guiding core beliefs that reflect a coherent and consistent universe. Critical thinking subjects our beliefs to scrutiny, and very few of them emerge from the process unchanged. Critical thinking typically leads us to qualify even our accurate beliefs as probabilistic rather than lawful, and as situationally true rather than universally true.

Critical thinking suggests that we probably don't know what we think we know, that facts are merely opinions, and that everything within our experience may be ultimately unknowable or, as Gödel (1931) says, "undecidable." A socially constructed, postmodern world is an annoying world for people trying to lay foundations.

All five sources of upset-losing face, losing faith, thinking the unthinkable, challenging beliefs, and challenging believing-are analogs of the way liveliness always upsets deadliness. The powerful always want to set their definition of the world in stone, like nations trying to agree that current boundaries are the actual boundaries between countries. Marginalized

groups whose sense of place is derived from community, rather than imposed by drawing lines on maps, will always ask just where those lines came from. Asking such questions is upsetting not only because it implies a different power structure, but also because it disrupts the presentation of the lines as authoritative, God-given, fixed, and dependable.

----- Original Message ----- From: Joel Dvoskin To: PSYLAW-L@listserv.unl.edu Sent: Saturday, June 14, 2008 11:04 AM Subject: Re: Deadly Therapy

Michael -

Any chance you could favor us with an excerpt?

Thanks and congratulations, Joel

Joel A. Dvoskin, Ph.D., ABPP Diplomate in Forensic Psychology University of Arizona College of Medicine

-----Original Message----- From: Michael Karson <mckarson@MSN.COM> To: PSYLAW-L@listserv.unl.edu Sent: Sat, 14 Jun 2008 9:47 am Subject: Deadly Therapy In case anyone gives a hoot, my new book is just now available. Karson, M. (2008). Deadly therapy: Lessons in liveliness from theater and performance theory. Lanham, MD: Jason Aronson. (Aronson is now a division of Rowman and Littlefield, www.rowman.com).

It's a broad critique of moments in psychotherapy that depend on the stultifying application of rules and categories to clinical situations, with recommendations on how to improve things. With respect to forensic psychology, I examine the power differential in treatment as a potential source of leverage and as a frequent source of self-protection at the expense of change. There's also an examination of science as a human subculture and its applicability to treatment problems, and a chapter on critical thinking that includes an explanation of Bayes' Theorem and its uses.

Thanks for indulging this announcement. Chapter titles follow.

Michael

Chapter 1. Lessons From Deadly Theater Chapter 2. Lessons From Performance Theory Chapter 3. What Am I Doing to Irma? Chapter 4. Status Games Chapter 5. Gender Is Something We Do, Not Something We Are Chapter 6. Deadly Multiculturalism Chapter 7. Therapeutic Privilege Chapter 8. Is Science Just Another Party Line? Chapter 9. Critical Thinking About Critical Thinking (with Janna Goodwin, Ph.D.) Chapter 10. Applying Theory to the Therapy (and Not Just to the Patient's Life) Chapter 11. Deadly Supervision Chapter 12. Fourteen Things We Can Do to Make Our Therapies Livelier