

# Freedom and Discipline in Contemporary Interpersonal Technique

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Psychoanalytic technique has, in earlier chapters of the field's history, been a complicated matter with considerable dispute among various schools about the proper way to conduct an effective treatment. But in the wake of what has been called the "relational turn" the very idea of technique has been challenged. Technique has increasingly been associated with a clinical detachment in which abstract categorization and prescription are imposed upon a unique human interaction. How, one might ask, can one prescribe the proper way to conduct an analysis when the process is now conceived of as a unique dyadic journey marked by the emergence over time of unpredictable relational patterns? What technical principles might find universal applicability in a process in which both participants have only limited awareness of events and enactment is presumed to be ubiquitous?

Nevertheless, the analyst, faced with the patient's needs still has to do something. S/he still has to conceptualize what an analysis can accomplish and what s/he can do to effect change. The analyst must still aspire to do the sorts of things that might transform their patient's life. And by corollary, s/he should carefully avoid doing those things that would in any way limit the process of therapeutic change. There remains, therefore, a need to conceptualize effective intervention. How to balance these two impulses – the freedom to act in a way that cultivates a singular, affectively rich encounter and the countervailing demand to work in a disciplined way toward a profound outcome – will be the question addressed in this course.

Week 1: On the link between technique, theory, and values

The first week lays out the dilemma of freedom and discipline in contemporary technique in greater detail. It addresses the solutions

proposed by a number of contemporary theorists and situates the issue of technique in the context of broad, often unspecified values.

Tublin, S. (2011), Discipline and freedom in relational technique. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*.

Stern, D (2012), Implicit theories of technique and values that inspire them. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 32: 33-49.

Week 2:

It's hard to imagine what thematically might join the two readings offered below; they seem to pull in diametrically opposed directions and that's exactly the point. With them, I hope to capture the distinct, and in some ways, incompatible pulls within Interpersonal psychoanalysis particularly as they shape clinical technique. The first, an application of Sullivanian detailed inquiry, portrays the analyst as an active seeker of information who employs a particular method both to understand the patient and structure the treatment. The second, by Erich Fromm, makes no mention of technique whatsoever. Indeed, its spirit would seem to discourage the prescriptive spirit of an accepted technique. Rather, it portrays the analyst's role in a humanistic enterprise where the aim is to combat the stifling impact of social inhibition.

Cooper , A. (1991), Character and resistance. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 27:721-731.

Fromm, E. (1975), Humanism and psychoanalysis. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 11:396-405.

For those encountering Sullivan for the first time (or the first time in a while), I'd also recommend Sullivan's (1954) *The Psychiatric Interview*, particularly pp. 56-130 for his description of the use of detailed inquiry.

Those looking for an introduction to Fromm's writing on character and culture might wish to look at his 1947 classic *Man for*

*Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics*, particularly pp. 38-115.

### Week 3: Flexibility and spontaneity

Interpersonalists have advocated an analytic stance that meets the specific patient and engages him or her in as genuine a manner as possible. This has entailed, historically, a position that Fiscalini (1994) has described as “pragmatic and pluralistic.” It has also allowed for far more self-disclosure than had been accepted in other paradigms. The two papers presented this week, one by Fiscalini, the other by Ringstrom (who is not an interpersonalist but writes in a manner sympathetic to the themes emphasized here) focus on the analyst’s freedom to adapt to the circumstances of a given treatment and a given moment in order to engage the patient in a manner that is authentic, alive, yet still analytic.

Ringstrom, P. (2001), Cultivating the improvisational in psychoanalytic treatment. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, **11**:727-754.

Fiscalini, J. (1994), The uniquely interpersonal and the interpersonally unique – On Interpersonal psychoanalysis. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, **30**:114-134.

### Weeks 4 Levenson – The Detailed Inquiry and the exploration of dyadic interaction: What’s Going on Here?

More than any other theorist, Edgar Levenson has sought to recast the interpersonal stance and the detailed inquiry in contemporary terms. Whereas Sullivan, acutely aware of the fragility of his deeply disturbed patients, largely avoided transference exploration, Levenson moved the interpersonal inquiry into the moment of immediate interpersonal experience. His structuralist sensibility (cf. Foehl, 2008) led him to see repeating patterns in the patients’ narrative, his dreams, and most potently, in its simultaneous expression in the encounter with the analyst. In his novel use of the detailed inquiry, Levenson retains a link with historical method but embeds it in a format that generates interactive processes that then become the focus of understanding.

Levenson, E. A. (1988), The pursuit of the particular: On the psychoanalytic inquiry. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 24:1-16.

Levenson, E. A. (1994), The uses of disorder: Chaos theory and psychoanalysis. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 30:5-24.

Levenson, E. A. (2009), The enigma of transference. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 45:163-178.

Recommended:

Foehl, J. (2008), Follow the fox: Edgar A, Levenson's pursuit of psychoanalytic process. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 77:1231-1268.

Fromm, E. (2000), Dealing with the unconscious in psychotherapeutic practice: 3 lectures in 1959. *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, 9:167-186.

Week 5: Wolstein – The encounter of equal persons

Benjamin Wolstein was a complex theorist whose work presaged much of what concerns many writers in the contemporary psychoanalytic literature. He was among the first to write at length about countertransference and many of his writings on psychoanalytic interaction anticipate the prominent role played by intersubjectivity in current theorizing.

Wolstein, however, was wary of the effect the analyst's adherence to theory and prescribed technique might impose on psychoanalytic treatment. His stance emphasized the power an encounter between two genuine selves, each unprotected by the armor provided by the abstractions or preconceived notions of metapsychology.

Shapiro, S.A. (2000). The Unique Benjamin Wolstein as Experienced and Read. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 36:301-341.

## Week 6: Post-Wolstein, the analyst's presence and participation continued

Wolstein influenced a generation of analysts who shared his emphasis on the mutative power of profound contact between patient and analyst. Darlene Ehrenberg's work has long combined that emphasis – she has long advocated working at what she calls the “intimate edge” between the two participants – with the judicious use of a specific mode of self-disclosure that offers a novel twist on analytic participation. The second essay, by Warren Wilner, offers another example of Wolstein's influence. Wilner eschews interpretation or really any linear sort of participation that aims at a specific outcome. He offers instead a creative and idiosyncratic mode of self-expression on the part of the analyst that cultivates a particular aliveness in the moment. Both authors aspire to heightened emotional experience in the dyad though Wilner's rejection of traditional technique is far more thorough than is Ehrenberg's.

Ehrenberg, D. (2010), Working at the “intimate edge.” *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 46: 120-141.

Wilner, W. (1998), Experience, metaphor, and the crucial nature of the analyst's expressive participation. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 34:413-443.

## Week 7: Dissociation and Enactment – Stern

Among the key innovations introduced by Relational theorists has been the insistence on the analyst as whole person: expert perhaps, but also flawed, conflicted, and no less hampered by dissociation and personal bias than his patient. The acknowledgement of the analyst's equal blindness, while bringing a welcome egalitarianism into the room, creates a technical dilemma, as the analyst can no longer count on his capacity to monitor his own participation. Donnel Stern, an interpersonally oriented Relationalist, has famously eschewed to imposition of a priori method (read technique) in psychoanalytic treatment. In the two articles below, Stern attempts to grapple with the paradox of the analyst's

responsibility to conduct an analysis (however that may be defined) while recognizing that he, like his patient, can often have little sense of what he is excluding from awareness.

Stern, D. (2003), The fusion of horizons: Dissociation, enactment, and understanding. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, **13**:843-873.

Stern, D. (2004), The eye sees itself: Dissociation, enactment and the achievement of conflict. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, **40**:197-238.

Week 8: External discipline: the analyst's relation to the psychoanalytic community

Formal discourse about the proper conduct of psychoanalysis – what used to be called technique – has receded as discussions of spontaneity, play, and genuine human relatedness have assumed greater prominence in the literature. One consequence of this has been that analysts' conduct in the consulting room is partially shaped by implicit community norms, which vary among subgroups of analytic practitioners. These two articles explore the role of analysts' relationship to the communities with which they choose to affiliate and how this shapes technique.

Greenberg, J. (1999), Analytic authority and analytic restraint. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, **35**:25-42.

Zeddies, T. (2001), On the wall or in the ointment: The psychoanalytic community as a third presence in the consulting room. *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, **37**:133-147.

Also recommended on this topic:

Aron, L. (1999), Clinical choices and the relational matrix. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, **9**:1-29.

Spezzano, C. (1998), The triangle of clinical judgment. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, **46**:365-388.