Invited Column: **WHAT IS A PSYCHOANALYTIC ACTIVISM?**

*Psychoanalytic Activist: Oxymoron or Fused Reality*

**by Diane Ehrensaft, Ph.D.**

There are some among us who feel they must leave their activist shoes at the entrance as they enter the hallowed halls of their analytic institute or cross the threshold of their consultation room. There are some, I among them, who keep those shoes on. Sometimes we are accused not just of engaging in “wild analysis,” but of being precariously wild ourselves. I write this as a call to all of us: 1) to dispel the Red Scare that to be a psychoanalytic activist is to turn the consulting room into a Communist cell with our patients as potential recruits; 2) to acknowledge the activist in each of us.

When I was fourteen I wrote an essay, “Communism—It Isn’t What You Think It is.” A myth abounds that psychoanalysts who identify as activists use the couch as a means to indoctrinate their patients with their political agenda, be it to bring peace to the Middle East, allow gays to marry, or stop the torture of political prisoners. How different is this than the 1950s cold war caricature of the “evil red” lurking among the American public to wreak havoc on democracy and transform the United States into a Communist dictatorship?

I am recalling my own seventh grade experience in a suburban junior high school in 1958. My favorite teacher was Mr. Dennis, our social studies teacher. We read *The Little Train That Could*, likening the little train that huffed and puffed to the small countries that fought for their liberation against the big countries who thought they could control everyone else. The takeaway message: If you tried hard and believed in what you were doing, it didn’t matter how small you were, you could make a difference and conquer powerful negative forces. Mr. Dennis mysteriously disappeared from our school, and we never knew what happened to him until two years later when we opened the Chicago Tribune to find a front page headline, “Pinko fired from Glenview school.” In the midst of the cold war, our favorite teacher had been hunted out and black listed all because he taught us to act on what we believed in and believe in what we acted on. It is to Mr. Dennis and his teachings that I want to dedicate this piece, as a model of professional as activist and activist as professional.

In 1968 I entered graduate school, despite my worries that it would not promote the revo-

**FROM THE EDITORS**

**Ghislaine Boulanger, Ph.D.  Ruth Fallonbaum, Ph.D.**

We assume the editorship of the Psychoanalytic Activist with great pleasure and great admiration for Steve Botticelli who, in his years as editor of the Activist, set the bar very high. As we write this introduction, just months after the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile and the BP oil rig explosion, Pakistan is reeling from floods; words like catastrophic, devastating, deadliest, costliest, and most destructive, have been rendered almost meaningless. What can psychoanalytic activism offer in the context of these events? In this issue, Susan Mailer, Annabella Bushra, and Maria Lechich share moving reports of psychodynamic work with survivors from the earthquakes, providing snapshots of the heartache of lives disrupted by massive calamity and the challenges facing those who try to help. Diane Ehrensaft’s answer to the question “What is psychoanalytic activism?” is a fitting beginning to a new series in which we invite colleagues to reflect on the topic. In “Marriage and Militancy,” Steven Botticelli offers a compelling personal and historical perspective on the struggle for gay marriage. With columns from Frank Summers (past Section IX president) and current president, Alice Shaw, we round out this issue and attempt to fill Steven Botticelli’s shoes. We welcome your comments and feedback. Ghislaine Boulanger at ghislaine242@gmail.com, and Ruth Fallonbaum at ruthfallenbaum@comcast.net.
I’m pleased to be offering some reflections from the Section IX President in this first edition of our Psychoanalytic-Activist under the editorship of Ruth Fallenbaum and Ghislaine Boulanger. After seven years of stewardship, Steven Botticelli has passed on the flame. I’m excited to experience what these two very bright lights will create here.

So here and now…Psychoanalysis for Social Responsibility continues the mission of promoting the engagement of psychoanalytically informed psychologists, related professionals, and psychoanalysis as a field in important social issues. As stated in our By-Laws: “The section will sponsor events and activities in which a psychoanalytic perspective will be brought to bear on social issues which may be related to psychological disturbance, educational projects with a mental health focus, human rights, race relations, discrimination, poverty and violence. The section will support projects that seek to promote the provision of psychoanalytically oriented clinical services to underserved groups of people and to expand the cultural applicability of psychoanalytic treatment.”

This mission grows in importance as living conditions in the United States provoke increasing anxiety. Unemployment stands at 9.5% in our nation, and 12.5% in my state --California. Recent reports project a continuing economic recession and high unemployment for the foreseeable future. Our nation is engaged in seemingly endless war and militarization even as many Americans ignore the suffering inflicted on civilians in affected countries and on our own veterans and their families. Democracies committed to civil rights, including our own, continue to use methods of torture aided by health professionals. Battles over civil rights, that we thought had been won, continue to be fought. Threats to immigrants are of grave concern. There are environmental catastrophes from the careless supervision of oil rigs to the squandering of natural resources. The media contribute to our anxiety by emphasizing the polarization of different factions, capitalizing on citizens’ emotional vulnerability and deterring critical thinking.

Section IX maintains that there is a profound and continuing interplay between our emotional experience, our inner worlds and many levels and aspects of the social, cultural, political and “natural” worlds we inhabit. Our programs, panels, publications and activities offer opportunities to contribute to this inquiry.

Two educational programs are planned for Fall 2010. The first, beginning perhaps before this issue is out, will be Economy Month. A paper by Andrew Samuels will be available on-line. Susan Bodnar, Lynne Layton, and Jennifer McCarroll of our Training and Education Committee will guide and structure a listserv discussion about the paper, that will be introduced by the author himself. In November, Susan Bodnar has proposed a three week blog style listserv discussion entitled: “The Psychoanalyst at Large”, in which members will be invited to write about their use of psychoanalysis outside of traditional clinical practice.

The Winter 2010 issue of Psychologist-Psychoanalyst, the Division 39 publication, printed a letter to the editor by Ken Thomas, Ed.D., in which he cautioned psychologists-psychoanalysts against “confusing their political views and interests with their professional roles…” He referred to a trend toward political correctness in which ideological concepts are projected onto patients in clinical settings. A response from members of Section IX will appear in the next Division 39 Newsletter. Further, with this issue, The Psychoanalytic Activist begins a series of invited columns from Section IX members describing the relationship between their activism and their psychoanalytic professional roles.

Members are involved in many educational, clinical and organizing activities central to Section IX’s concerns and goals. There are a total of seventeen Section IX members presenting at the upcoming APCS (Association for the Psychoanalysis of Culture and Society) Conference October 22-23, at Rutgers University. Of interest to all Section IX members is a roundtable discussion entitled: Claims on Women’s Bodies and the Struggle for Human Rights, and a panel addressing endless war, disavowal of responsibility and the fantasies and realities of the warrior. (To view the APCS Conference Program: www.apcsweb.org). Jess Ghannam, of Division 39; and from Section IX: Jancis Long, Jerry Gray and I are the founding members of a developing international coalition of Health Professionals Against Torture. To read more about this exciting initiative, go to (www.hpatcoalition.org).

We look forward to the annual Section IX invited panel for the Division 39 Spring Meeting. In April 2011, we will be honored by Robert J. Lifton, Rachael Peltz and Frank Summers’ participation in our panel entitled: Why We Matter: Psychoanalysis, The Experiencing Subject and a Clinging to Hope; Protean Dilemmas in the Culture of Psychoanalysis. The panel will explore the value of psychoanalysis both in the consulting room and as a counterforce to the dangerous social trend toward objectification and dehumanization.

This year, the Section IX Board hoped to engage more of the membership in Section activities and projects. We have been characterized as a group with a very active board and quiet membership. I recognize that Section IX members are deeply engaged in activities off the radar of the Section IX listserv. For those of you who would like to be more involved in our section’s activities, please let us know, let me know. There are many opportunities and you are very welcome.

alice.shaw@comcast.net
When I was an undergraduate, I read a book by two political science scholars, the thesis of which was that we had learned from the Korean War to accept the limits of our ability to control the destiny of other nations. A few months later Lyndon Johnson began his expansion of the war in Vietnam, and more than 50,000 American, 2,000,000 Laotian, 3,000,000 Vietnamese lives and eight war-torn years later, we pulled out of Vietnam, and the pundits once again told us that we learned that we cannot impose our will on sovereign lands. It seems superfluous to note that we have been fighting a war for seven years that was expected to be won in no more than a few months because we would be “greeted as liberators.” To be sure, the nation tired of each of these major post-WWII conflicts and showed little interest in military intervention in their wake. Nonetheless, in each case the withdrawal from military action to control sovereign nations did not endure, a fact indicating that any skittishness about intervention was only a temporary collision with reality rather than a loss of conviction that we can control other nations and their way of life.

I draw attention to this denial of history because I believe it applies to the present moment both nationally and in our own profession. Now that official APA policy on psychologists’ involvement in detention centers has been changed, and the nation has received a pledge from the Obama Administration not to engage in torture, there is a tendency to believe that we have learned the lesson of having overstepped the line of human decency in international conduct. One can almost hear a palpable sigh of relief that we have now put this sordid episode behind us. But we have no indication as yet that the nation or our profession has acknowledged nor learned from the moral erosion of adopting or acquiescing in the transformation of the United States into a torture society. Furthermore, evidence indicates that some forms of torture continue to be used (albeit not to the extent that occurred in the Bush years) and that psychologists are still involved despite the APA policy shift. The APA, while publicly trumpeting its new anti-torture policy, has done little to see that it is implemented.

The APA has not ever acknowledged its role in abetting the torture policies of the country. There is, therefore, little reason to expect APA to be the guardian of psychologists’ involvement in unethical techniques that could be used by any future administration. A few examples will suffice to demonstrate the depth of the denial pervading APA leadership.

From the time it was revealed that psychologists were involved in torture, the APA has insisted that psychologists needed to be in Guantanamo to keep interrogations “safe, ethical, and legal.” It has never admitted that psychologists were doing no such thing; they, in fact, designed and implemented the torture. There has been no apology and not even an acknowledgement that official APA statements were not only wrong, but also provided a defense for psychologists who committed ethical and legal violations.

After opposing the referendum that changed APAs policy to oppose psychologists’ involvement in illegal detention centers, the APA now trumpets its passage as proof of its anti-torture stance. It makes no mention of its opposition to the policy it now uses to justify its claim to be an ethical organization.

The APA refuses to admit the blatantly obvious conflict of interest in the PENS task force it set up to adopt its pro-coercive interrogation policy, and it still denies the persistent falsehoods it promulgated while excoriating those who pointed out the mistruths.

The Ethics Committee published what just might be the poorest excuse of a “report” in the history of professional organizations on changing Standard 1.02 and then ignored its own “reasoning” in suggesting the organization drop the “Nuremberg defense” that allowed psychologists to violate the ethics code. While we can be pleased that the “opt out” clause was dropped, the Ethics Committee has not been held accountable for claiming Standard 1.02 could not be changed “without further review” and then changing it without further review.

Briefly stated, the history of the APA policy on psychologists’ involvement in detention centers is disavowed. While APA, with the implicit acceptance of the membership, played a central role in the shift of the United States into becoming a torture society, the organization acts as though psychologists were never involved in torturing innocent people and the APA never complied with torture policy.

The truth and reconciliation process that has taken place in South Africa in the wake of Apartheid is absent from American life, including in the profession most complicit with torture policy. To undergo “truth and reconciliation” is to face the reality that egregious ethical violations have been committed and to admit that organized psychology played an important role despite its public relations façade. This disavowal of ethical and even legal transgressions is critical because the old shibboleth is true: if history is ignored, it will be repeated. As analysts, we see that denying the motives of one’s behavior while resolving to change it creates the illusion that one will do it differently while setting the stage for repetition. The disavowal of APAs and psychologists’ behavior indicates as clearly as anything can that the lessons of complicity have not been learned and that APA will not address nor engage in public discourse regarding its own behavior and psychologists’ role in a sordid chapter of U.S. history. Because we cannot expect the APA to provide a forum for the ethical erosion of the profession, it is up to those of us who abhor torture and do not want to see psychology implicated in anything resembling such behavior again to find ways to hold accountable those who have been willing to engage in harmful behavior.

Two avenues are currently being utilized. At this writing complaints have been filed against several psychologists in an effort to remove their licenses to practice. In addition, legislative initiatives are taking place in some states. California passed the Ridley-Thomas resolution calling on the Department of Defense to not use licensed healthcare professionals in torture. The Gottfried bill, currently winding its way through the New York legislature, if passed, would go further by prohibiting healthcare professionals licensed in that state from participating in torture or cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment, at risk of loss of licensure.
The Psychoanalytic Reporter:
Earthquake in Haiti

Thirty Five Seconds
by Annabella Bushra, Ph.D. and Maria Lechich, Ph.D.

Introduction:
In the aftermath of the January 12th, 2010 earthquake, a call went out on our institute’s list-serv for members who wanted to help the Haitian community in New York City. We volunteered and were assigned to a private Haitian religious school that went from nursery through 8th grade. Although initially we went together in February, we ended up going separately to ensure that the school had at least one of us present each week through the end of May.

We met with about 10 children across the age range, some of them just once before their families moved on to live elsewhere, some for many visits. Annabella, who is bilingual, worked with those children and teachers who only spoke French or were just more comfortable in that language. Some of the children and one teacher had been in Haiti at the time of the earthquake, either as permanent residents of Haiti or as visitors; these children gradually came to the U.S. with their families, but some of the children were brought to live here with uncles or aunts. Other children, of Haitian parentage but residing here, were deeply affected because of deep losses of close extended family in Haiti. Most of the children were living in the midst of much grieving.

“35 seconds Madame, 35 seconds. That’s all it took for everything to be destroyed. The buildings, that was nothing. It is the loss of humanity, of the culture, of the government, the services, of Haiti. All the children. All the children lying dead in the streets, spread out for identification. All the young doctors, lawyers, police, functionaries, all dead. All that promise. We are speaking of generations, of the human infrastructure of our country. It will never be the same.”

Teacher who survived the earthquake.

Maria and I arrived on a cold morning in February, walking carefully over packed snow to get to the school. We were shown the teachers’ lounge in the big old building. Windows covered with lace curtains, a couple of them cracked, it was a little cold in there despite the space heater. We met the teachers in two groups, first the middle-school and then the lower-school teachers. From the first group we learned of the children’s fears that Haiti was being punished for being evil, and how the science teacher, who also teaches religion, has used this as an opportunity for a lesson in tectonic plates and the ubiquity of earthquakes. He was also proud of a relief project he had organized: we were surrounded by cartons of water, food and clothing contributed by the families. A few English teachers had already had the kids write poems or small essays. Many students had lost family members, and their parents at home were crying. From the second group we heard about the teachers’ losses, and how difficult it has been to help the kids when there is so much personal sorrow. One teacher had lost her retirement house (her life’s savings) and was mourning 30 people in her extended family. Many cried as they spoke, often in French, and they comforted each other. “No one knows when God will take any of us. Our time could be tomorrow.”

At the end we all held hands and bowed our heads, and a prayer was said asking God to watch over Haiti, to welcome into his realm those who have died and to give us all strength to survive the losses and to help each other. “Que Dieu nous bénisse.” May God bless us.

So the work began.

“Céleste’s grades have dropped, no one knows why, and she is acting up in class. Some of her very close family in Haiti died in the earthquake. Could you talk with her?” I was expecting a tough little kid. Céleste arrived at the door of the teacher’s lounge, her rounded features and elegant cornrow hair highlighted by her big intense eyes. She may have been only 11, but she had the poise of a much older person. I told her that I was a psychologist, and that I was there to speak with the children whose families had suffered from the earthquake. I inquired about what she thought had changed for her recently. She told me about her aunt Desirée, a surgeon, who had been crushed at the hospital during the earthquake. She told me that she went to bed at night crying alone. That she would often wake up crying from a dream of being in Haiti, seated next to her uncle on a curb outside the church where her aunt was being mourned, comforting him. She could not tell her mother, who was depressed and grieving. Her father had asked her to comfort her mother as he, Desirée’s brother, went for long walks at night. There was no one to talk to.

I had her tell me many stories. She drew a picture of Desirée in a turquoise dress, wearing earrings that her church did not approve of. Below the picture, she wrote, “A brave, strong, courageous woman of passion and determination, may she R.I.P.” Stories about her six cousins. Five of the cousins had been brought over to live with their aunt in another state, but the youngest had to stay in Haiti with a foster family because she did not have a U.S. passport. Céleste missed her cousins and worried about them, she wished she could talk with them or have a picture to look at and remember. She wished that they would come to live with her because her mother was a good mother, and if she could see them she’d know they were safe and well taken care of. But mostly she worried about her uncle who had had to leave the memorial service. She had seen him on CNN being interviewed, and asked how to get a tape from CNN. We talked about finding him on YouTube.

Over time, her dreams changed. In one of them Desirée is talking to Jesus at the end of time, making suggestions to help people get into heaven and Jesus is listening to her ideas respectfully. Many themes repeated across the children. The need for communication and for pictures of their cousins and friends. Wondering what had happened to their schoolmates — one drew a map of his neighborhood showing where his friends lived and the layout of his house. The many questions fueled by imagination: about the end of time, about Haiti being punished by God, about the unburied dead wandering the streets as cats and then transforming themselves back into people. There was much anxiety, sadness and loneliness because of the intense mourning and pain around them. Here in New York there was fear of being out on the street, “another earthquake could happen and then the buildings would crush you.”

Our presence absorbed the overflow for the children who bore too many questions, and too much pain and fear, by themselves.

annellabushra@cs.com

Louis was 10 years old and in third grade when we met. His bright smile and friendly manner defied the horrors that he had witnessed. At the time of the earthquake he was in his grand-
continued on page 5
mother’s home. His race to the roof as the ground trembled saved his life. His memories were vivid: ‘The ground was finished, broke, broke, broke! I thought the earth was going to vanish. It was a battle with Satan. Someone had disobeyed God!’ Louis’ grandmother and infant cousin were crushed by falling debris. He witnessed his mother vomiting and screaming from the devastation and loss. She was then hospitalized, leaving him alone and homeless with his equally young cousin. “I was so afraid no one would give me food. I was scared. I was crying. It was over an hour before I saw a grown up”. He said that thieves were scaring people into abandoning their homes to gain access to their belongings by telling them “water was coming.” Louis was one of the last children to make it onto the plane to New York.

My first session with Louis: “I didn’t know if I’d be here today. I might have been in heaven. You have to stop going places. If you go out, a car can hit you so you have to pray before leaving home.”

Louis’ trauma was conveyed in his drawings. His feelings of powerlessness were expressed in his self-portrait, missing feet and hands. In another picture he was playing outside having fun on a sunny day when a thief appeared stealing all his toys. Louis was preoccupied with his father’s ideas about returning to Haiti. It terrified him to think of his father in harm’s way. Louis was playing with his family and having fun. He kept returning to the book from week to week until he said he didn’t feel sad anymore and asked that we finish the project. Toward the end of our work together Louis asked me if I had heard about the book series called *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, a cartoon-illustrated story about the trials and tribulations of an ordinary boy during his middle school years. Louis told me that his family couldn’t afford to buy him the books and asked if I could get them for him. He was most grateful. Louis reported every gruesome detail of this story to me. The retelling made him jumpy and more determined to deter his father from returning to Haiti for the funeral.

In order to help Louis develop a narrative for what he had been through, I suggested that we make a book together called *All About Me*. He dictated the story and illustrated the different chapters. The story begins with a chapter that identifies his family members and then transitions quickly to stories that convey his feelings of vulnerability and loss. In one chapter, “The Terrible Storm,” he is devastated when the big wind suddenly blows away a project he prepared for school. In “The Worst Earthquake” he writes, “The next day there was a terrible thing that happened. And the worst!!!! thing that happened was that people were dying and people lost family members.” “The Stealers are Lying” reflects one of his most prominent fears, the theft and looting that followed the earthquake. The book took more than six weeks to finish. By the end, the story shifted to a more optimistic future. He wrote about his new life in school, playing with his family and having fun. He kept returning to the book from week to week until he said he didn’t feel sad anymore and asked that we finish the project. Toward the end of our work together Louis asked me if I had heard about the book series called *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, a cartoon-illustrated story about the trials and tribulations of an ordinary boy during his middle school years. Louis told me that his family couldn’t afford to buy him the books and asked if I could get them for him. He was most grateful. Louis reported every gruesome detail of this story to me. The retelling made him jumpy and more determined to deter his father from returning to Haiti for the funeral.

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Unfortunately, their efforts had not sufficiently been coordinated with the town officers, so that their presence added to the existing chaos. As a result, many of them decided to “put up shop” in tents on the devastated streets and wait until someone in need of talking showed up. In due time, some form of organization prevailed and the next contingents of psychologists were able to reach out more efficiently. Psychotherapists from institutes such as the Family Therapy Institute and the Psychoanalytic Institute went to several locations to provide service.

On February 27, 2010 at 3:40 AM the central and southern part of Chile was hit by an 8.8 earthquake that lasted nearly three minutes, later to be followed by several tsunamis. Its epicenter was in Coquimbo, a small fishing town about 500 miles south of Santiago. The magnitude of the catastrophe is hard to describe. Imagine a natural disaster of such intensity that its effects are felt in one third of the territory of the United States, leaving a large number of towns along the coast razed to the ground. This is what happened in Chile.

The Chilean population is used to earthquakes, and tradition has it that every 25 years, there’s a “biggie”. This was one of those “biggies.” So not only the government, but the population as well, reached out to help in whatever manner was possible, and psychologists also jumped in. Several psychology departments from different universities sent out groups of students to aid those with post-traumatic stress. Busloads of psychology students arrived in different seaside villages and cities with the desire and energy to help.

The Psychoanalytic Reporter: EARTHQUAKE IN HAITI

Appointment in Chile
by Susan Mailer, M.A.
Psychoanalyst, Santiago, Chile

On February 27, 2010 at 3:40 AM the central and southern part of Chile was hit by an 8.8 earthquake that lasted nearly three minutes, later to be followed by several tsunamis. Its epicenter was in Coquimbo, a small fishing town about 500 miles south of Santiago. The magnitude of the catastrophe is hard to describe. Imagine a natural disaster of such intensity that its effects are felt in one third of the territory of the United States, leaving a large number of towns along the coast razed to the ground. This is what happened in Chile.

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When my partner and I got married in 2004, the occasion did not lack for charm or romance. We spoke our vows to each other in the backyard of the Provincetown justice of the peace, accompanied by the friends we were spending the week with and their two kids. Afterwards we walked out onto the jetty that juts into the harbor and drank champagne with our friends. Later on Noah and I wandered out onto the beach at the end of the jetty, where we received a congratulatory phone call from my (now) father-in-law. As it got dark we drifted hand in hand back into town to have dinner at our favorite restaurant. A party with friends and family in New York would follow the next month.

But unlike how it usually is for most heterosexual people, our marriage did not especially mark a deepening of our commitment to each other (we had already been together 15 years). Nor were we motivated by a pursuit of government benefits (none that would be meaningful to us were offered at the state level, and in any case our marriage did not seem to be breaking out all over the country. Jason West, the 26 year old (heterosexual) mayor of New Paltz, NY, had taken to marrying gay couples every week in the town square. In San Francisco lines of same sex couples formed outside City Hall as they waited to receive marriage certificates; 4000 would be issued before the California Supreme Court halted the proceedings a month later. And in the early morning hours of May 17, a huge and hugely moving rally took place outside Cambridge City Hall to cheer the couples gathered there to fill out their notices of intent to marry, the legal basis for which had been approved six months earlier by the Massachusetts legislature.

The movement for marriage equality proceeded more quietly over the next four years as some states (mostly by judicial order) approved gay marriage while others (all by ballot measure) passed laws prohibiting it. That quiet lasted until the passage in November 2008 of Proposition 8, a ballot initiative in California that stipulated marriage to be defined as “between one man and one woman,” following a campaign into which each side had poured tens of millions of dollars. People took to the streets once again, now in a mode of protest rather than celebration. Breaking out first in cities in California, the protests quickly spread around the country, culminating in an organized nationwide day of rallies and marches on November 15. Much of the media coverage of the protests noted the spirit and anger of the participants. The LA Times, for instance, in covering the protests in that city reported that “…12,500 boisterous protesters converged about 6 PM at Sunset and Santa Monica Boulevards …the Silver Lake rally began with fiery speeches from the bed of a pickup” (Blomemkat, et al, Nov. 9, 2008). My favorite placard at the New York protest read “Focus on Your Own Damn Family!”, riffing on the name of the of the organization that had pumped millions into the Yes on Prop 8 campaign. (Another feature of much of the coverage in the aftermath of the Proposition’s passage was the report—since shown to have been inaccurate—of the disproportionately high level of support the bill received from African-American voters in the state.)

Public protest holds a special poignancy for gay men and lesbians, as people who have often endured others’ hatred alone, in silence. The experience of being verbally, sometimes physically, teased, taunted, tormented is one that reverberates powerfully in the minds and lives of many gay people. Ken Corbett (2009), in contemplating the impact a child patient had on him when he called him “faggot,” evokes the continuing and visceral power such experiences hold: “[T]he word entered my limbs, crafted my gestures, bent my spine, and shaped my mind” (p. 183). Considering the motivations of childhood tormenters from the seemingly safe distance afforded by adulthood and psychoanalytic understanding, he writes, “Defensive relations, obsessive, overly determined, competitive, and verbally aggressive, countered by wordless withdrawal, were collected and enacted over and over again” (p. 183).

The possibility of responding to homophobic aggression with something other than wordless withdrawal was something I experienced for the first time at a protest march through the streets of lower Manhattan. It was July 4, 1986, the day after the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of a Georgia sodomy law that made it illegal for gay people to have consensual sex in private. 1986: The New York Times would not use the word “gay,” (“homosexual” was their term) and in fact editorialized in favor of the court decision. July 4: It was the centennial of the arrival of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor, and thousands of tourists bedecked in green styrofoam crowns to celebrate the occasion lined the streets. As we marched, they jeered at us, shouting epithets. I had been homophobically taunted before (through one period of my adolescence, quite a bit), but never with so much company—and what a difference that made. Standing up to bullies, foolishly on one’s own, suddenly becomes possible when joined by others, who now form an army of the assailed. A simple example of Sue Grand’s (2010) profound insight that “Courage is not an essence, it is a relational process” (p. 17). Facing the tourists’ bracing hate, the friends and strangers I was with shouted back, just as loudly, just as angrily. I had never felt more powerfully connected to other people in my life.

That experience propelled me into years of gay rights and AIDS activism, and fostered a particular zest for street protest that continues to this day. I have come to think of demonstrations as restagings of the scenes of my homophobic victimization, under much improved circumstances. The real or imagined presence of jeering counterprotesters (who in recent years appear variably in pro-war, anti-immigrant, or anti-gay guises) affords the opportunity of facing the hatred of the other,
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ution that was just around the corner. I had a choice between clinical, community, and developmental psychology. I rebuked clinical psychology, because it only helped one person at a time. I rejected community psychology because it did not allow me to pursue my passion—work with children. So I chose developmental psychology—I could study child development and then apply it to aggregates of young children, creating change for many. I tell you this story not to bore you with the details of my past, but to share with you how wrong I was in that thinking. It was Pete Seeger who showed me my folly—“Inch by inch, row by row, going to make that garden grow.” I have now worked for over thirty years as a “retread” clinical psychologist that garden grow.” I have now worked for over thirty years as a “retread” clinical psychologist and psychoanalytic activist. I have come to see that the inches are the work we do with each person we treat, the rows are the thoughts and insights we have about that work, and the garden is the social context we must attend to and the social struggles we choose to engage in to make this a saner world.

Let’s start with inches. It is not our job to change the thinking of the people who come to us, but rather to put our minds together with theirs to untangle the knot of conflicts, confusions, and conundrums that plague them. The root word of activist is act. To be an activist is to take action. I myself have immersed myself in work with transgender and gender nonconforming youth. When a teenager comes to me and says he feels like dying because he gets called “fag” approximately thirty times a day at school and his stepfather mutters “pervert” when he walks into the room with his dyed hair, make-up, and purple leggings, I do not simply sit and listen; I do not simply make interpretations; I also “act” by acknowledging the unrelenting transphobia that penetrates his being, so much so that it makes him want to die. Have I overstepped the boundaries of clinical neutrality? To the contrary, I understand my actions as the evidence of activism at the ‘inch’ Level, weaving together the external realities confronting this youth with the internal life he lives to help him make sense of his felt experience as a transgender teen in a transphobic world.

Now rows. I know some have felt that Section IX is not the right place for them because they are not involved in social activism and devote their energies to their clinical work and the thinking and writing they do about that work. Cast by some ardent activists as armchair intellectuals, these thinkers and writers may fail to recognize the profound level of activism they are involved in—not just the activity of their minds attempting to make sense of things, but the codification of that knowledge so others can make use of it. I am recalling Tom Ogden’s introduction to The Primitive Edge of Experience. He invites the reader to engage in a relational process with him. He puts out his thoughts and then every reader will bring to the writing his or her own subjective experience so that the chapters themselves become an interactive process rather than a product. An activist is one who acts on the world to make change. Can an article, book, or conference presentation actually do that? In 1933, Wilhelm

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Does History Have to Repeat Itself?

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There is a nascent effort to do something similar in Illinois.

If our members were to initiate actions such as these, or others that might be thought of, in the states of their respective residences, two purposes would be served. First, the issue of torture and psychologists’ involvement in it would be kept before the consciousness of both the public and the state politicians. That in itself has tangible value. But, even more importantly, the imprint of torture as a violation of professional standards would be encoded in the law and thereby extended to future generations. Despite the ethical indifference of the APA, we would be ensuring that any psychologist who may be tempted to follow the torture policy of the present or a future administration would be confronted with a risk to her professional life.

In that conflict, the history of psychologists’ participation in torture would be kept alive, thus assuring that history is not once again denied and repeated. History will not be disavowed in the minds of psychologists who hesitate to act because they risk loss of their ability to practice; it will be very much in the present. And that needs to be the legacy of this ethically repugnant time.

Franksumphd@gmail.com

To join Section IX, and to renew your membership for 2011, please fill out this form send it with a check for $40 ($20 for students and candidates) made out to “Section 9, Division 39, APA” and send it to:

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Psychoanalytic Activist: Oxymoron or Fused Reality
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Reich published The Mass Psychology of Fascism. In 1974, Juliet Mitchell published Psychoanalysis and Feminism. In 1981, Joel Kovel published The Age of Desire. All of these books applied psychoanalytic theory to social realities. Each has had a profound impact over time not just on how we think, but how we act. For example, it is no longer taken as bedrock that every girl wants a penis, yet we recognize the power and privileges men hold when we take action to address, “What do women want anyway?” It is not that the pen is mightier than the sword, but that the pen is a catalyst to action—we think, therefore we do.

What about the garden? Some of us who are Section IX members have recently been mucking about in the garden. The particular corner of the garden has been the unethical and illegal practices of psychologists in military interrogations. We came together to formulate an action—to withhold dues in protest of APA's position on the role of psychologists in military interrogation sites. We joined a coalition with other concerned psychologists. We participated in drawing up a referendum that would enforce a policy that no psychologist would take part in activities at military sites that would violate the ethics of our profession or the international code of human rights. The referendum was passed by the APA membership. Were we acting in our role as psychoanalytic psychologists? Yes and no. No in that I don’t think those of us involved would be any less motivated to take action on what we saw as unconscionable atrocities if we had never been involved as psychoanalytic psychologists. Yes in that our psychoanalytic understandings gave us a unique perspective—on the social hysteria that can turn a blind eye to torture as it pursues its perceived persecutory demons; on the depersonalization that comes from primitive fear merged with social power; on the dissociation that would allow someone to orchestrate or condone the repeated virtual drowning of a prisoner with social justification.

I’ve come to the conclusion that one cannot be a psychoanalytic psychologist without being an activist of sorts. Although historically we spoke of the “talking cure,” we no longer abide by the medical model. We do not create a one-time cure for a disease; we collaboratively join our mind with the mind of an other to catalyze change—be it an individual other, an institutional other, or society at large. We have the unique vantage point of understanding that the “power of the people” is on the outside and the inside, in the conscious and the unconscious, if we can only fuse them together. Rather than leaving our activist shoes at the door, let’s remember that these boots are made for both walking and talking, and I invite us all to march together, albeit each to the beat of our own drum.

References

Appointment in Chile
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I have chosen to describe the experience of a group of child psychotherapists who recently went to the city of Constitucion, to work with children at risk of developing PTSD. The psychologist in charge, Ana Lia Stutman* contacted the headmaster of one of the city schools and together they organized a weekend of activities with the children and their parents for mid-June of this year. What motivated her was the idea that these children who had suffered chaos and fear, destruction and loss in the previous months could perhaps, through play and in the presence of a witness, reconnect with their experience and in this way be helped in the hard transition period that lay ahead.

Seven child therapists with psychoanalytic training led by Ana Lia who is their supervisor saw four children each, in two individual play sessions and two group sessions. They were also able to see 19 parents of the 22 children. The therapists were in Constitucion for two days, and each night, once the work with the children was over, they engaged in a group supervision, which helped them process their own charged emotional reactions. The sessions were set up in a classroom which included a table, two chairs and a box with toys, the idea being to offer a facilitating environment that might help the children process their feelings and residual fears surrounding the earthquake and its aftermath.

Daniel’s case is particularly poignant. At the time of the earthquake, he was sleeping at his grandmother’s house with his older sister. His mother, father and two younger siblings were home in their apartment. The movement of the

* I would like to thank Ana Lia Stutman who has shared with me the valuable work she has been doing in Constitucion

\[ \text{dehrensaft@earthlink.net} \]
behind. Even though they had made important gains, we knew our work wasn’t finished; how could it be? Their level of need simply exceeded what we could give them. Loss and longing were blurred and translated into a wish for a second tent to send to their family who were too crowded in one tent; a wish to introduce the psychologist to the church community; a need at times for food, or for pictures of their family in Haiti. The needs were powerful and hard to resist.

At the end, holding hands in a circle, many teachers expressed gratitude to God for bringing us to their school following the earthquake. And we wondered how people who have endured so much loss, who were mourning their beloved Haiti, still found it in their hearts to thank God for anything.

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**Thirty Five Seconds**

*Reward*

It was hard to say good-bye, to leave the kids behind. Even though they had made important gains, we knew our work wasn’t finished; how could it be? Their level of need simply exceeded what we could give them. Loss and longing were blurred and translated into a wish for a second tent to send to their family who were too crowded in one tent; a wish to introduce the psychologist to the church community; a need at times for food, or for pictures of their family in Haiti. The needs were powerful and hard to resist.

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**Marriage and Militancy**

*Reward*

and being able to hate back. While marches and demonstrations are of course only one aspect of political work, I consider such hating to be a making good on what Corbett (in a different context) refers to as “the productive possibilities of aggression” (2009, p. 218). Adrienne Harris (1989) offered up a similar idea over two decades ago, in an essay whose title tells the story: “Bringing Artemis to life: A plea for militance and aggression in feminist peace politics.”

Many leftists have been skeptical of the movement for marriage equality as the latest focus for the advancement of gay rights, based on a critique of the role of the state, religion, and/ or monogamy, but for me there seems something apt about the choice. I see it as an attestation that despite having absorbed so much hate, we have—mysteriously—remained capable of loving each other. Ato, too, in the way that private relationships have become the occasion for so much public celebration and protest, demonstrating the way we all simultaneously live “in both the intimate and in the collectivized registers,” as the “singularity...always inscribed with a multitude” (Grand, 2010, p. 181; see also Gentile, 2008).

Other activists do believe that winning marriage rights could be an important part of the larger project of ending gay oppression. The historian John D’Emilio, for example, reasons that if heterosexual marriage were dislodged as the exclusive basis for receiving legal and economic benefits (health insurance, retirement benefits, tax breaks, etc.) it would make it “harder for heterosexual privilege to reproduce itself. The other side of heterosexual privilege, of course, is homophobia and queer oppression” (Wolf, 2009, p. 22). He notes, however, that the history of the gay liberation movement shows that if heterosexual marriage were dislodged as the exclusive basis for receiving legal and economic benefits (health insurance, retirement benefits, etc.) it would make it “harder for heterosexual privilege to reproduce itself. The other side of heterosexual privilege, of course, is homophobia and queer oppression” (Wolf, 2009, p. 22). He notes, however, that the history of the gay liberation movement shows that
quake caused the apartment above them to collapse onto his parents’ room, killing them and his sisters immediately.

Daniel walked into his first session with a tentative smile and sat down. Ana Lia asked him if he knew why they were together, to which he nodded and started playing. He laid out cars and different objects such as houses, people, and cars, and with a toy gun started shooting at them randomly turning them over in what certainly looked like a re-play of the earthquake. He went on for a while. Eventually, he said he was tired, constructed a closed space and gathered the cars, buildings and people into what he called a huge parking lot. Ana Lia thought that after such a discharge of anger and frustration, he was trying to construct a safe haven, protected by the rails of the parking lot, in which to keep what was left. She needed to feel he could do something to protect himself and his family. She mentioned something of this order to which he nodded. When they parted after the second play session, Daniel showed Ana Lia his cell phone; he mentioned his mother had recently given it to him for his birthday. It had music that he and his mother had chosen together, as well as a picture of the family that had been taken shortly before they had died. Moved, Ana Lia felt he had been able to protect his memories by keeping his mother and family in a transitional object that would probably carry him through the trauma.

Even though Daniel’s case is particularly dramatic in terms of his ability to make use of the therapeutic relationship with Ana Lia, all the children from ages 6-12 gained some relief from the sessions and said so in the group encounter. The parents were grateful, and seized the opportunity to talk about the disruptive effect the earthquake had had on their lives: they were left without their homes, without any of their possessions, were living with relatives or in pre-constructed single room homes they had been given by the government. The children also expressed their grief at having lost their prized possessions such as toys, DVD games, and TVs. One can imagine how important the cell phone was for Daniel; it was a saved object that represented a time when his whole family was alive.

Before the psychologists left Constitucion they agreed on a date for a second visit in September with the group of parents and children. A third visit has been scheduled for January 2011.

The experience of the earthquake is never far from the minds and lives of all Chileans. A few weeks ago I was at a dinner party. One of the guests, talking about the earthquake, said his summer home (coincidentally in Constitucion), the house that had been his parents’, in which he had grown up, had all but disappeared. As he walked through it he was able to rescue a couple of whisky glasses that had belonged to his father. He felt that now, when he sipped his afternoon whisky, the simple act of drinking in that glass helped him get in touch with Constitucion, with his childhood and his long dead parents in a way he hadn’t been before the earthquake. I was moved by his story, and my thoughts went to Daniel and the profound meaning of recovered objects in the midst of enormous loss.