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Book Review: *The Power of Connection*. By *Jane S. Hall*. New York: International Psychoanalytic Books, 2022, 257 pp., \$21.95 paperback.

From the beginning of *The Power of Connection*, Jane Hall invites us to question our certainty, especially when it comes to what we think we know about psychoanalysis. She opens with this quote by Thomas Ogden (2007):

The analyst's feeling of certainty is often tied to the idea that there exists a proper "analytic technique."...By contrast, think of "analytic style" as one's own personal creation that is loosely based on existing principles of analytic practice, but more importantly is a living process that has its origins in the personality and experience of the analyst. (p. 1185)

Hall invites the reader to travel with her through her own living process, demonstrating how her analytic style has changed since her seminal work, *Deepening the Treatment* (Hall, 1998). She reflects on five decades of work as a psychoanalyst, weaving together theory, clinical vignettes, neuroscience, and jazz into a colorful, textured tapestry. Hall seeks to engage the reader who is new to psychoanalytic concepts and curious about depth psychotherapy, invite the seasoned psychoanalytic reader to consider the contributions of neuroscience, and encourage the classically oriented analyst to contemplate the potential of mutuality and intersubjectivity. On this last point, *The Power of Connection* reads as though Hall is in conversation with orthodox colleagues and mentors, or perhaps with an earlier, more classically oriented version of herself.

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Hall acknowledges early on that to some, her ideas will seem “old-hat” (p. 3) and to others, “un-psychoanalytic” (p. 3). Since *Deepening the Treatment*, Hall has shifted from a relatively classical to a relational approach, emphasizing mutuality, symmetry, and intersubjectivity over asymmetrical interpretive work and defense analysis. Curiously, she does not contextualize her evolution as taking place in relation to the many developments within the field of intersubjective psychoanalysis over the last few decades. I was reminded, for example, of Mitchell’s seminal works and his position that the patient needs not so much insight but “a sustained experience of being seen, personally engaged, and, basically, valued and cared about” (Mitchell, 1993, p. 25). Hall states that the underlying theme of her book is “how two strangers connect and the importance of that connection” (p. 5) and argues that both therapist and patient “must be free to share experiences when appropriate, in contrast to the abstinent/blank screen approach advocated by orthodox analysts” (p. 11).

While certain aspects of Hall’s analytic style and theoretical orientation remain consistent, such as her emphasis on benevolent curiosity and her developmental view of psychoanalysis, others, such as her position on self-disclosure, have undergone relatively significant changes. In *Deepening the Treatment*, Hall (1998) warned that unthinking self-disclosure risked moving the focus from patient to therapist. Couching her position in solid theoretical and clinical terms, Hall advised that “any time the therapist makes a decision to disclose personal information it is most helpful if she analyzes her decision” (p. 16).

Given that Hall emphasized a cautious approach to self-disclosure in her first book, and that she has since revised her stance to allow for more flexibility and spontaneity when it comes to sharing personal information, one is left with a desire to know more. A primary critique of relational work points to overemphasis on the analyst’s subjectivity. In attempting to provide a corrective to a positivist, one-person psychoanalysis, the argument goes, relational treatments have lost sight of the distinction between patient and analyst, and, ironically, of the patient’s subjectivity separate from the analyst. Given her substantive experience with the spectrum of psychoanalytic theory and technique, Hall is in an ideal position to discuss the critiques of orthodox and contemporary models through personal reflection of her own development as an analyst. It would have been helpful to know something more, for example, about how and why her thinking about self-disclosure, and psychoanalytic

treatment more generally, has changed. Would she still advise that therapists analyze decisions to self-disclose? Are there circumstances in which she would be more or less likely to self-disclose? Might there be patients with whom self-disclosure is indicated or contraindicated?

Questions around Hall's more permissive stance regarding self-disclosure aren't only technical in nature; they are also personal. What motivated Hall to make this change? Did she find that her previous stance on self-disclosure had a negative impact on the analytic process and on patients? Were there certain cases that changed her? What has it been like to change in relatively significant ways? I do not pose these questions solely as critique; I ask because knowing more about Hall's journey in this regard would be helpful. Many therapists might find it difficult to allow themselves the freedom to change, to relinquish the stability of analytic identity and well-honed technique in the interest of evolution and could benefit from learning more from Hall about her personal process.

Interpretation is another convention of psychoanalytic practice that Hall questions and reworks. She prefers what she calls "explanation" (p. 82) to interpretation and gives examples throughout the text of what she means by this. The primary difference seems to involve the relational spirit through which such interventions are communicated. Interpretation, from Hall's perspective, emerges within an asymmetrical, hierarchical relationship where there is clear role distinction and limited mutuality. Hall recommends a restructuring of the analytic relationship where asymmetry is deemphasized, and analyst and patient might be better described as companions or cotravelers. She envisages a shared journey that requires tremendous humility, openness, courage, motivation, and spontaneity on the part of both travelers if real, lasting change is to happen.

Again, Hall encourages a pivot from a one- or one-and-a-half-person psychoanalysis, which emphasizes asymmetry, to a two-person relational process that emphasizes mutuality, yet she does not explicitly link her approach to the relational school. Further, Hall's critique rests on an orthodox definition of interpretation. However, interpretation itself has been the subject of debate and evolution within psychoanalysis and has various definitions depending on the theoretical lens through which it is being described.

Hall's idiosyncratic "slant" (p. 3), as she calls it, comes through in her positioning of psychoanalysis as analogous to jazz music. "It is the surprises in analytic work and in music that have kept me going—and I wish

the same for you” (p. 197), Hall shares as she muses on parallels between psychoanalysis and jazz. She invites the reader to listen to various jazz instrumentals as an entry into the kind of analytic engagement she encourages, rooted in creativity, improvisation, and attuned interaction. Most of all, though, Hall argues that the analytic relationship must be based on “a form of love based on concern” (p. 32), what Shengold (1999) described as *caritas*. Hall calls for a “level playing field” (p. 12) within the therapeutic dyad, where, through the “power of connection,” the damage caused by childhood trauma can be redressed, and the related tasks of differentiation, separation-individuation, and self-formation can be reworked. “Cure is not our goal,” Hall articulates, “allowing development to proceed toward the achievement of autonomy is our job” (p. 113). Citing contemporary neuroscientific, affect, and child research, Hall argues for a more flexible, fluid perspective of development than Freud’s structural model, one that holds open the potentiality of change throughout the lifespan.

Another keystone of psychoanalytic practice that Hall takes up—working with the transference—has evolved tremendously since Freud. Hall states that while she has always believed that negative transference and underlying feelings of rage must be expressed, she questions “how much and for how long” (p. 3). She argues that one of the most important questions for the analytic dyad involves how to deal with the transference because “an ongoing expression of primitive rage can wear both parties down and may engrave an original trauma more deeply in the brain’s neural pathways” (p. 3). This stands out as one of the most poignant points of exploration in Hall’s book. She considers the matter with depth and breadth, incorporating vivid clinical material along with elemental psychoanalytic thinking and emerging neuroscientific research.

Hall’s pragmatic style is an invaluable asset, especially when discussing her approach to negative transference. Offering clear examples of disrupting negative transference respectfully and empathically when it could otherwise “engrave an original trauma more deeply” (p. 3), Hall advises, “conversations are helpful when negative transference goes on for too long” (p. 153). For example, Hall offers a vignette in which a patient, Jill, hesitates to tell her therapist something because she assumes the therapist could not possibly be interested. The therapist replies, “Well, the fact is that I am but what we need to figure out is why you would imagine that I wouldn’t be interested” (p. 105). Hall describes this as an

“ego building” (p. 104) invitation to work with the therapist on deepening their shared understanding of transference and differentiates this from an asymmetrical interpretation.

While Hall’s example may not seem particularly innovative to relational analysts, this intervention reveals a distinction from the orthodox approach she distinguishes herself from throughout the text. By sharing with her patient that she is in fact interested and clarifying that the shared task of the analytic dyad is to understand Jill’s assumption that she would not be, the therapist is working in a transparent mode that emphasizes mutuality over asymmetry.

Having worked for years with patients who have endured varying levels of familial and cultural trauma, I found Hall’s approach refreshingly down to earth and grounded in an intuitive understanding of psychoanalytic theory that informs a sensitive, respectful technique. Anyone who works with trauma, which in truth is every therapist, can appreciate that sometimes patients need to feel our genuine presence and authentic interest in collaboration, more than they need us to wear the negative attributes of transference without interruption. Such interventions demystify the process, enabling a kind of candidness without compromising psychoanalytic principles, and help build a therapeutic relationship where “restoring the capacity to care about oneself and others is the therapeutic challenge” (Shengold, 1999, p. 286). Through case material, Hall demonstrates how this can be achieved, such as in the touching work she describes with Richard, who after years of analysis came to see that while his mother lived through him, Hall cared for him. Hall doesn’t shy away from how challenging and time consuming such transformation is for both patient and analyst, quoting Shengold (1989), “To accept the analyst as a separate person and then as a primarily benevolent one takes years of seemingly endless repetition and testing. . . . The analyst and patient must be able to last it out” (p. 313).

Hall emphasizes how delicate and strenuous it is for the analytic dyad to work toward liberating the patient from the bad enough objects to which they so tenaciously cling. She defines sadomasochism, so common in our practices and in our world, as a “blend of the raw rage of disappointment and intense needy love” (p. 108). Locating its origins in ordinary infantile omnipotence, Hall describes the painful, at times infuriating experience of working with sadomasochistic transferences, where the patient takes pleasure in defeating the therapist/mother by continuing

their own pain and suffering. Hall recognizes that “Pain has magical powers” (p. 135), making it even more difficult to relinquish. She states, “it can assuage guilt about being separate, it can contain rage and its attendant anxiety, it can protect against unbearable loneliness because it is always available” (p. 135), and reminds us that a particular challenge is the fact that the “internalized abusive object representation is threatened by treatment” (p. 135).

Turning to Ella Sharpe, Hall centers benevolent curiosity as a guiding principle in analytic practice, quoting Sharpe’s (1950) timeless line, “When we react to something that causes us to think ‘I cannot understand how a person can think or behave like that’ curiosity has ceased to be benevolent” (p. 12). Hall critiques the assumption that the source of a negative therapeutic reaction lies primarily within the patient and suggests, “If a patient refuses our help maybe we should look at how we’re offering it” (p. 118). She suggests straightforward ways to address therapeutic impasse, and she invites the therapist to look within, to make use of countertransference to better understand the patient, but also to consider the possibility that we might be doing something wrong. I wholeheartedly agree with Hall’s critique, but I wondered why she did not contextualize her thinking within the relational and intersubjective literature, where a two-person field does not allow the analyst to remove herself from the patient’s reactions.

Even as she models a willingness to reflect on what she might be doing to contribute to negative therapeutic reactions, Hall emphasizes the importance of maintaining the frame, thereby showing patients that we have tamed our own sadomasochistic impulses. Consistent with her sensible style, Hall lists examples of actions (or inactions) on the part of the therapist that communicate avoidance of the patient’s rage, such as agreeing with the patient’s wish to cut down or end treatment prematurely, rearranging appointments frequently at the patient’s request, and letting the patient run up a bill or not charging for missed sessions. Whether you’re a nascent or veteran therapist, these are quintessential reminders as to why too loose a frame might protect the clinician from her own anxiety and fragility but do little to help the patient.

Hall’s homegrown wisdom is like warm stew on a winter day—comforting, substantial and satisfying. She has a way of presenting complex theory and research, applied to confounding cases, in a style that is palatable to the novice and recognizable to the weathered analyst—a rare gift in

a world that has practically shunned, yet desperately needs, psychoanalysis. Her work is rooted in foundational psychoanalytic values, yet inspired by creativity and a willingness to let go of conventions when they get in the way of connection. Hall's slant is inspired not only by her patients and psychoanalytic mentors, such as Martin Bergmann, whom she interviews, but by her love for jazz music. Hall states, "The psychoanalyst and jazz musician have something in common: the magic and spontaneity of improvisational interaction that leads to something new" (p. 178). Indeed, an alternative title for this book might have been *Psychoanalysis as Jazz: Something New*. In her writing and clinical work, Hall "soothes, disrupts" (p. 244). Like jazz musicians improvising with one another, Hall describes the analytic dyad as one in which "we lean on, break free from, ignore, embrace, argue, attack, agree, and so much more" (p. 181). Hall, in giving herself the freedom to find her own voice, offers the reader, as well as her patients, a similar invitation. As I read and played with Hall's ideas, I found myself leaning in and breaking free, ignoring and embracing, agreeing and arguing.

As for arguing, while Hall offers a contemporary view by bridging the gap between classical theory, relational perspectives, and current neuroscience, she misses an opportunity to integrate postcolonial critiques of psychoanalysis, and to cite recent works that center social context and cultural trauma (Belkin, 2021; Holmes, 2016). Hall mentions Freud's misogynist assumptions and patriarchal context but stops short of acknowledging the Eurocentric, colonial framework within which psychoanalysis developed. Hall recognizes the impact of certain environmental factors on the individual, such as poverty, extreme wealth, loss and illness, and devastating climate events, but there is little reflection on the influence of sociocultural contexts on her own thinking and development as a person and analyst. For example, when she describes an experience early in her career of working with Mr. S, an unhoused Black male patient, there is limited discussion regarding how her social location may have affected countertransference and transference dynamics. Further, while she mentioned Mr. S's racial identity, we did not learn similar details about other patients, such as Jill and Richard, who we might assume were white. This problem is endemic within psychoanalytic case studies and indicative of the assumption that white is default; race is often only identified when discussing BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) patients, as though

whiteness were not also a racialized identity with significant social, emotional, cultural, and relational implications.

It could be said that such considerations were outside the scope of this book; I would argue, however, that if psychoanalysts want to engage and appeal to rising generations of clinicians, postcolonial critiques of theory, practice, values, cultural context, and social location must be regularly and vigorously incorporated into our thinking. Shengold's *caritas* is not only needed within the intimacies of analytic work, but also on the frontlines of our troubled world. As we reckon with the legacies of colonization, transmitted through systems and institutions (including psychoanalysis), but also through psychic mechanisms that blunt access to interior affects and exterior suffering, restoring the capacity to care about oneself and others is not just a therapeutic challenge, but the challenge of our time.

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