

Shirley Wade

## Dependency Factors and the Accreditation of Psychotherapists- *A Personal Reflection*

I want to be a therapist. It would be nice to have professional status with a government approved licence to certify that I was competent. A nice boost for my ego, my sense of security, my self-confidence: somebody else had guaranteed that I had something of value to offer in this field. But social workers seem to be increasingly concerned at the extent to which their official position is encouraging their clients to adopt a child-parent dependent type relationship towards them. Perhaps government certified status would not be so good for my clients either?

In 1968 while I was sitting at my office desk one afternoon an intense pain developed in my head followed by violent vomiting. I went to a doctor the following day, and after a careful examination he said it was 'muscle pain, nothing serious', and refused to give me a certificate. This seemed to me a most unlikely explanation for what I had experienced, but after all he was a qualified doctor; who was I to set up my own opinion against his? So I disregarded my own instinctive feeling about my pain and went back to work. Subsequently it transpired that I had had a haemorrhage and should have been lying flat in hospital.

At one time I had to go for an interview with a doctor whom I mistakenly thought to be a practising psychotherapist. I allowed my subconscious to open up, but the session was terminated abruptly without the careful restoration of my normal state which I had expected. I was left feeling that black filth was pouring out of me, and with a horrible obsession that babies were evil and I had a duty to squeeze their necks until their eyes popped out. It took several days of struggle to get this repressed material repressed again.

Not so long ago I went for some treatment feeling extra nervous because the previous time it had hurt. Hypnosis was suggested, and since I knew I responded well to hypnotherapy in a group situation I happily agreed. The induction technique was different but sensible for the objective to be attained. However an instruction that I would be more easily hypnotised next time was included. I disliked this. It offended my sense of adult autonomy? But he was a professional person; who was I to object; so I accepted this. Post-hypnotic suggestion that I would be relaxed and free from worry was given, and I was brought out of hypnosis. The result was effective and I went home satisfied. Unfortunately, however, no time limit had been set to the post-hypnotic suggestion. I got up the following morning still under the instruction to relax, and collapsed on my bed like a puppet whose strings had been dropped. Then I lay there happily free from worry. It was midday before this state wore off, and then I plunged into horrible depression. It was as though all the various bad feelings which had been kept down by the instruction not to worry had welled up at once. I forced myself to go out and be with people and this brought me back to normality.

On another occasion I went to a doctor to complain about a pain in my left knee which had been getting worse over a period of months. After examination and questioning he diagnosed arthritis and gave me a form to take to hospital for an X-Ray. Two days later I saw my psychiatrist, and after asking the same medical questions he said he didn't believe in the arthritis. Why had I chosen to have arthritis in my knee? If I wanted to have arthritis I could have had it somewhere else, in my hip for example; why had I chosen my knee? Immediately I had a vision of my mother's knee, and by the end of that session the pain had eased considerably. The following evening at a group I was taken on a fantasy trip into my knee, after which I had no more pain at all.

These four incidents in my life I remember because of their dramatic content but probably there were others. Three demonstrate the extent to which I allowed my own judgment to be overridden to my detriment because the person dealing with my problem was a licensed professional. In the fourth I was fortunate in being able to transfer my faith from one licensed professional to another.

Am I unusual in this reaction? Surely not in view of the attention being given to this issue by social workers. Don't we all, patients and clients, want to give up our judgment to nice mummy and daddy figures who will look after us. When I first started going to encounter groups I hated the concept of 'Take responsibility for yourself'. It ran counter to all my desire to find a father figure. Eventually I came to appreciate its value, and it became the one thing which finally enabled me to creep forth slowly and painfully from my concept of myself as a child who ought to be protected and cared for by others. My psychiatrist was very good at dealing with dependency reactions, to the extent that I left one session feeling like an orphan child thrown out into the storm. Nevertheless I always found some other way of projecting my dependency needs back onto him. They were, though, my needs; nobody had put me in a dependency situation; and their resolution was part of my responsibility for myself.

In my view the introduction of professional licensing for therapists would be dangerous. We would allow it to subvert our adult autonomy. Oh Bliss! A beautiful father figure handed to me on a plate. But if I have made my own choice. Used my own judgment on the suitability of what is being offered for my current needs, then this is more difficult. The adult part of my personality has already been involved in the transaction, and the memory of this remains as a constant reminder that I am not really a child.

Therapy is essentially concerned with helping people to work through neurotic clinging to childhood emotional patterns and to develop into fully functioning adults. It is surely absurd to try to help people to become more adult by denying them the right to make free adult choices. To my mind believing that therapists should be licensed is like believing in democracy but not in the right of people to decide themselves for whom they will vote.

Therapy developed from medicine through psychoanalysis, and is suffering from the

misconceptions these associations cause. It is not like surgery; something somebody does to me. It is more like education; something I learn to do for myself with somebody else's help. Surely I should be allowed to decide for myself to whom I can best respond as a teacher. I received individual tuition in French years ago from three different people. With one I was involved and interested for the whole lesson, with one I was content to be there, but with the third I was so bored I gave up. All were qualified teachers at a reputable language school, but their personalities were different. My interaction with one was profitable for me, with another useless.

I would never feel competent to choose my own surgeon, and I can accept that there may be grounds for licensing psychoanalysts - at least by their own professional organisations - since the withholding of the analyst's personality would make free choice a difficult process. However most therapy done in this country today is done on a face to face basis, and since the personal interaction is so important in determining progress I claim that I should be allowed a free choice in this area of life.

Moreover I claim far more than the right to choose what is good for me, I claim also the right to choose an incompetent therapist if that is what I want to do. To me one of the most vital and important but difficult ways of valuing human life lies in allowing people to choose what I think is wrong. 'For unto every one that hath shall be given: and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath'. Unless I have the freedom to choose to hide my talent in the earth, there is no value in my choosing to make constructive use of it. I claim the freedom to choose badly; to choose to grow or not to grow; to choose a highly qualified therapist or one with no qualifications at all. And this is not a choice I am prepared to give away to a governmental licensing authority.

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## Hop, Skip, Jump

it was not that she couldn't do crossword puzzles.  
playing with people  
was a far, far, easier game.

Wilson Stapleton