

Counterresponse to Jean Knox

By Soren Ekstrom, Ph.D.

I am very encouraged over Jean's response to my exploration of the analyst's memory. While I focused mainly on bringing into discussion models from the community of cognitive scientists, she has added a fuller picture of what is actually going on in the broader analytic community. I was not trying to downplay these efforts. I think we both agree that in spite of the contributions she quotes, much of the theoretical discussion within the various schools of analysis is confusing and often counterproductive.

Jean's detailed account of the results from attachment theory studies adds a valuable dimension to the topic under discussion. I must confess much of this material was new to me and I am eager to explore these studies in more detail.

At this point, I only wish to make a few more comments. The first has to do with how we can encourage more empirical study of the issues that are specific to analysts and analytic practice. As long as the splits within psychoanalytic institutions continue, such efforts are going to be hampered by the lack of articulation of what actually needs to be studied. We cannot expect cognitive researchers to plow through all our journals and debates in order to find out. We have to do a better job formulating the questions and let it be known how our experiences may be further tested.

My second point has to do with the Jungian community in particular. I don't think it is too much to ask the IAAP to designate particular time slots at the congresses for the analysts who

are interested in formulating particular approaches to research.

Finally, I am eager to make a few more detailed comments to what Jean has offered us, and I have to begin with insisting on sharing some of the credit for what she liked about my paper. My exploration of the different types of narrative which analysts construct, those in the sessions, shortly afterwards, and upon further reflection, was actually begun by Joseph Cambray (2001), in his JAP article on enactments and amplification.

I also wish to stress Jean's point about the implicitness of the analyst's memory, that what we are dealing with when we discuss cognitive models are not only conscious, ego-determined responses, but what she so correctly calls "unconscious, abstract, and generalized patterns or models." In fact, our notion of the breadth of unconscious memory probably needs to be revised upward. Even compared to what Jung has to say in his Tavistock lectures (1935), cognitive theorists such as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1999) have a definition of the cognitive unconscious which far surpasses what we usually see in the analytic literature:

Cognitive scientists have shown experimentally that to understand even the simplest utterance, we must perform these and other incredibly complex forms of thought automatically and without noticeable effort below the level of consciousness. It is not merely that we occasionally do not notice these processes; rather, they are inaccessible to conscious awareness and control. (p. 11)

What Lakoff and Johnson refer to is not caused by repression but represents the culmination of learning from the time we are born and includes visual and auditory processing, attention, aspects of language such as phonology and grammar, conceptual systems, mental imagery, emotions, and the conceptions of motor operations. All these instances involve neural processing before more conscious cognition or action can take place.

In this light, I am not so sure that Michael Fordham's (1995) comments about waiting to collect enough information for a "silent hypothesis" capture how the analyst's memory works. I would rather rely on Jean's own description when she says that "much analytic work centers on implicit memory processes for both patient and analyst" and that analysts, beginning in their own analyses, "develop their capacity to 'tune in' to implicit levels of relationship, screening out surface detail." This sounds very much like what I was trying to describe when discussing the analyst's stories or scripts and the indexing of those that happens as the result of expectation failures.

As I think we all know from experience, we draw from scripts no longer conscious and we do so because of the way we have this material indexed. Only upon further reflection may we be able to connect to how the full narrative came about. David Tresan (1996), in one of the early Jungian explorations of neuroscience, is probably correct when he states that "we are all creating our psychic lives all the time, working to remember, working to forget, both day

and night, from raw data gathered over our lifetimes from inside, from outside, and from feedback circuits" (p. 421).

He suggests that one area where analysts have a unique contribution to make is in developing an instrument for studying the ability to symbolize and to discern the differences between levels of symbolization. Jean suggests that the relationship between developmental process and how unconscious narratives are woven together is another worthy study of the gradual emergence of what she calls "explicit knowledge and self-awareness."

For me, the type of expert memory which analysts develop is a third worthy study. In other words, several approaches have already been suggested for the study of what we as analysts do, approaches which could benefit from further exploration in a more experimental environment. I really hope that Jean's and my exchange has shown that these possibilities exist and that they would enhance our knowledge and our effectiveness.

References

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