

## **A Response to my Critics**

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**ABSTRACT:** The author responds to criticisms and personal attacks in defense of his recent controversial article on a critique of relational psychoanalysis. Critics charge that Mills fails to live up to scholarly standards, uses rhetorical devices to unjustly discredit certain relational authors, takes clinical material out of context, and has committed unethical and libelous acts. Mills attempts to show that these criticisms largely lack solid rationale, distort or ignore crucial textual evidence, rely on *ad hominem* arguments and emotional polemics, and fail to convince the author of their genuine merit. He denies all accusations of professional misconduct and draws into question the political motives and intellectual honesty of some key figures identified with the relational turn.

The expressed purpose of “Commentary” is to serve as a forum for dialogue in response to articles published in this journal. Commentary on my work preceded its publication in this journal. For this reason it is important for the readership to be aware of the historical background that informs my response to my critics. At last year’s conference of the Division of Psychoanalysis of the American Psychological Association held in New York City, I was chair and moderator of a panel titled, “Relational Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dialogue.” There I delivered a paper called, “Why Freud was Right: A Response to the Relational School.” This presentation was a subsection of a much

larger article that subsequently appeared in *Psychoanalytic Psychology* under the title of “A Critique of Relational Psychoanalysis,” (Mills, 2005), the subject matter of this reply. At the conference as well as in print, I charged the relational school with illegitimate attacks on classical psychoanalysis by radically misrepresenting and distorting what Freud actually said in his original texts. Such inaccuracies show poor scholarship and are overstatements that serve to promote an unwarranted theoretical divide between drive theory and relationality, which I allege is due, in part, to informal fallacies construed to politically advance a “new” relational paradigm at the expense of understanding what Freud truly has to offer us.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the panel presentations and commentary provided by a respondent, I was immediately verbally accosted and vilified by Irwin Hoffman and Jody Davies both of whom responded by yelling at me, thus requiring a panelist to ask them to calm down and act civil. Hoffman uninhibitedly devalued my character while Davies told me that I had no right to critique

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<sup>1</sup> The reader should be informed that despite the fact that I practice as a relational analyst in the consulting room, and hence feel qualified to critique the relational school from within its own realm of discourse, I am also a Freud scholar by philosophical training. I can appreciate differences of interpretation, explanation, scholarly distinctions, and redirecting shifts in emphasis that have informed the history of the psychoanalytic domain, and I actually think it is a good thing to promote a healthy debate of ideas, but I do not feel most representatives of the relational tradition have accurately understood Freud’s mature theoretical corpus nor have they fully grasped the relational aspects or implications of Freud’s thought. In fact, relational psychoanalysis has made its claim to originality and popularity “based on the radical rejection of drive” (Greenberg, 1991, p. vii). This was one of my main points at the conference.

Stephen Mitchell who is dead and unable to defend himself in person, stating that he was a close friend of hers for whom she is still grieving. I conveyed my sentiment over her loss but told her that this was a critical discussion of ideas in professional space and that his words, which I quoted verbatim, are in the professional literature and open to critique.

Hoffman, on the other hand, bellowed that I was completely arrogant, lacked humility, and dismissed everything I said outright as rubbish. When I appealed to textual evidence to the contrary, in his moment of judgment, with all his affected hyperbole and ranting, came the *Dies Irae*. “You’re wrong!” This was the sum and substance of Hoffman’s response. No attention was paid to my overall argument, let alone the minutiae of my criticisms; only an *ad hominem* frenzy expressing his own rage. Within one week after my article appeared in this journal, which outlined the same argumentation I presented at the conference, he wrote me a disparaging email claiming that I was “egregiously irresponsible” and “totally unjustifiable” in my criticisms—all of which he stated were “outside the realm of legitimate academic discourse,” despite the fact that the article had passed a blind review process. I invited him to write a formal response to my ideas so we may engage these issues in a professional manner, but apparently he didn’t “have the time.”

Both Hoffman and Davies were livid, indignant, and emotionally unrestrained in their outrage toward me, and this was all displayed to an audience ambivalently gripped with a mixture of dismay, apprehensive excitement, and anxiety. At the end of the talk, I approached Davies to extend the olive branch but she refused to shake my hand, until I told her that was not very relational of her. In a recent memorial issue of *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* devoted to Emmanuel Ghent, the leading relational journal where Davies is co-editor, Carolyn Clement (2005) characterizes Ghent as a man who “abhorred the potential for rigidification or fetishism with regard to any important

movement or paradigm, including the emergence and evolution of relational psychoanalysis” (p. 119). I wonder what Ghent or Mitchell would have to say about their friends’ behavior. And what was the finale? Davies and Hoffman left the conference room in scorn, reproaching me the whole way out. This is the only time I have encountered such unbridled hostility at a professional conference for offering a critique of ideas. Not only did I experience their behavior to be rude and uncivil, they fundamentally demonstrated an inability to rationally debate matters of theoretical disagreement or entertain alternative positions to their own without devolving into vitriolic name-calling and character assassination. And if anyone questions the veracity of what I am saying, then you may determine for yourself by listening to the whole exchange that was recorded and is available on CD Rom (see Sound Images, Inc., 2005).

This event symbolizes a much larger problem within psychoanalysis. The history of our discipline is replete with competition and contention, divided group loyalties, tendencies toward splitting and character slander, narcissistic displays of superiority and grandiosity, rigid collective identifications that oppose competing points of view, and political ostracization under the emotional direction of retribution, abuse of power, and intolerance of difference for perceived transgressions against what any school believes is unadulterated dogma. No wonder critics have bemoaned psychoanalysis for its mismanagement by its adherents. This politic has fueled splintering and factions in psychoanalysis since its inception, and I doubt it will ever change. But when key leaders of the relational movement succumb to such emotional polemics based on a simple economy of intolerance for difference, it hurts us all in a discipline whose goal is the pursuit of meaning, knowledge, truth, and potentially wisdom.

What I believe is fundamentally dangerous is the inability to engage leading relational

proponents in genuine dialogue about contemporary ideas, despite the fact that they profess to uphold such ideals. Only our discipline can properly appreciate such a contradiction, for it speaks to a broader voice, namely, the echo of human nature. We all get emotionally attached to our ideas because we identify with their value and invest them with personal meaning. When they are challenged we understandably feel threatened and frequently wish to lash out, alienate, or aggress upon our perceived or projected enemy. And we need to have enemies. What would psychic life be like if we all agreed on the same thing? I for one would find it boring. But ideological intolerance of difference is simply unacceptable in any academic or scientific discipline: It does nothing but lead to stasis and exploitive, corrupt power differentials that erode the advancement of any intellectual pursuit. The minute we are prohibited or dissuaded to engage in critique, let alone reviled for doing so, we betray our intellectual integrity as a behavioral-social-human science and lose all credibility as a discipline. And what became of the so-called “dialogue” after the Hoffman-Davies imbroglio? It vanished, chalked-up as “pseudo dialogue” by the respondent.

If Hoffman and Davies are accurate representatives of the relational tradition, and I hope they are not, then this would lead any reasonable person to question its viability and leadership. Such undisciplined display of aggression directed at me in public professional space based on theoretical differences reflects to me their insecurity, narcissistic fragility, and intellectual vulnerability. The minute I questioned some of Stephen Mitchell’s ideas, I was radically split off, it seems, as a bad object that needed to be castrated because I challenged their way of thinking and did not show the same degree of deference to Mitchell. This is not intellectualism, it is fundamentalism. What is ironic is that while this movement launched its claim to fame by abnegating Freud, this behavior unequivocally mirrors Freud’s own narcissistic pursuit of power, tenacious demand for loyalty, and

unsavory tendency to alienate anyone who challenged his authority. A cult basis its practice on indoctrination, prohibition of autonomy, and the oppression of free thought and speech. If you dare question cult doctrine, you are immediately seen as a heretic and are promptly excommunicated. I have both personally and professionally felt the backlash.

At least Bob Stolorow, George Atwood, and Donna Orange have some professional integrity to address my arguments directly, and for this they have my respect. Let me first of all say that I have admired much of their work, for we are all interested in seeing psychoanalysis broaden its horizons, to use their metaphor, by embracing philosophical principles. I am on the same page in many respects with their overall project, yet we simply happen to have differences in emphasis, not to mention scholarly disagreements when it comes to key aspects of their collective writings. They have introduced many important philosophical concepts to a psychoanalytic audience that has either remained oblivious to or simply uninterested in properly engaging. In doing so, they have done a great service to our field.

In response to their particular criticisms of my characterization of their work, let me address a few points in turn. To me, the overarching complaint they have is that I “fail” to cite all of their work. As I stated specifically in my article, my critique could not possibly address every relational analyst’s point of view, theoretical allegiance, or philosophical preferences that are associated or identified with this movement let alone Stolorow et al.’s “entire collected body of combined works” (Mills, 2005, p. 160, fn 3). Instead I carefully inform the reader that “I hope to approximate many key tenets of relational thinking that could be reasonably said to represent many analysts’ views on what relationality represents to the field” (p. 157). What they charge as a “failure to cite” as “lapses in scholarly rigor” or as “sloppiness” is in fact merely my choice not to read all their publications.

No author is reasonably expected to know every aspect of other authors' works, especially with colleagues who are as prolific as Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange. This criticism in itself does not negate my critique of their ideas they once held, which unbeknownst to me, they may have amended at a later time. I am actually pleased to see that they wish to distinguish themselves from other relational analysts who displace the notion of the unconscious. Yet their particular views still remain a point of theoretical difference between us. Let me explain why.

Stolorow et al. claim that because I do not adequately situate the context of their writings when quoting or interpreting their work, I annul the notion of the unconscious in their combined theories, which they uphold. But this is not accurate. I specifically stated in my article that they account for the notion of the unconscious (p. 160; fn 3) but it is "decentered," not annulled. Instead, I say the very thing they criticize me for allegedly omitting in their response, namely, that they "privilege" conscious experience, to which they give "priority" (p. 160), over unconsciousness. Although I readily concede that the authors object to being equated with other relationalists who do not adequately address the nature and being of the unconscious in contemporary discourse, Stolorow et al. still bear the onus of explaining their own textual contradictions.

They quote a long passage from Stolorow (2001) where they italicize "crucial words" that I allegedly leave out in my article, hence claiming that I mischaracterize their project. As I originally stated, "it becomes easy to see why Stolorow invites misinterpretation" (p 160). Here Stolorow (2001) italicizes various phrases to emphasize his affirmation of an unconscious, such as subjective defenses that "*exclude whatever feels unacceptable, intolerable, or too dangerous in a particular intersubjective context*" (p., xii-xiii). But this statement could imply a defense model of dissociation that does not necessarily require a dynamic unconscious based on repression theory, a point that

Freud attempted to distinguish from contemporaries such as Morton Prince, Charcot, and Janet. Moreover, Stolorow uses the term *prereflective* in his original text. Here in his reproduction of that passage, he inserts the qualification “[i.e., *unconsciously*],” which he places after the word “prereflectively,” a descriptor not included in his original text. He obviously wants to equate or associate prereflexivity with unconsciousness. But this equivalence does not necessarily follow, at least it is not transparent to this reader. It is incumbent on Stolorow to define his terms in language that is customary to a certain readership, and not simply invoke language that means different things to different philosophers that come from different philosophical traditions.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The notion of prereflectiveness is associated to several continental philosophers dating back to Hegel and Fichte, but it is most notably associated to Sartre who, inspired by Brentano’s notion of intentional versus non-positional states of consciousness, disavows Freud’s dynamic unconscious for a model of self-deception (*mauvaise foi*) based on prereflective consciousness. Given that Stolorow has often identified himself with the phenomenological tradition (most recently, see Stolorow, 2004b), this could easily confuse any reader familiar with the history of the concept of prereflexivity. For example, Sartre’s (1943) magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness*, was a phenomenological project on ontology. Given that Stolorow is now by his own account a graduate student formally studying philosophy (Stolorow, 2004a), he is enamored, rightfully so, with the many diversified, albeit competing and contradictory philosophical theories that challenge traditional psychoanalytic concepts. In fact, due to his response to my critique, I have pleasantly read some of his recent works where we are likely to be in frank agreement. I particularly see a commonality between our attempt to account for the phenomenology of lived experience, developmental trauma, intrapsychic organization, personal meaning and metaphor, and unconscious

Other points of scholarly misunderstanding stem from Stolorow's use of the term "experience," a word almost exclusively used by phenomenologists. With the exception of Alfred North Whitehead (1929) who speaks of the cosmos as "throbs" or "drops of experience," which I have articulated in the context of a wider unconscious ontology (Mills, 2003), the only other author I am aware of in the relational literature that systematically invokes the notion of "unconscious experience" is Donnel Stern (1997) who, from my reading, prefaces his thesis on postmodern principles that privilege language and linguistic social structures, hence a conscious enterprise, over a dynamic unconscious that prepares such processes to emerge in the first place. In their quoted passage (Stolorow, Atwood, & Orange, 2001b, pp. 48-49), they attempt to distinguish two forms of unconsciousness, each of which emerge from conscious experience. They attempt to describe that which is repressed, although this could be interpreted as merely being dissociated, as well as that which was "never allowed to come into full being" or that which was "never able to become articulated." To me Stolorow et al. appear to be saying the same thing Don Stern describes as unformulated experience. The question still remains whether the unconscious precedes or is forged through conscious experience. If intersubjectivity is privileged as a totalistic category of experience,

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structure. But our main point of difference, as I can tell, is that I am fundamentally a psychoanalytic ontologist and that Stolorow is a psychoanalytic phenomenologist. He privileges consciousness over unconsciousness, while I have argued extensively (Mills, 1996, 2002) that conscious experience, hence the realm of phenomenology, must be necessarily prepared *a priori* by an unconscious ground (*Ungrund*). Therefore, my main point in my article is to situate Stolorow et al. in the same camp as other relationalists who privilege consciousness over unconscious process, especially given that they concede in their reply that they have "challenged its priority."

then we are reasonably lead to speculate that the unconscious is created by conscious (linguistic) experience, hence becoming a repository for shapes of consciousness—thus subordinated in its causal efficacy, agentic functions, and dynamic teleology—or it is dispensed with altogether. Here relational authors have to attend to these conundrums more carefully rather than merely throwing the word “unconscious” around and assuming we all understand its meaning when these theoretical revisions challenge its very existence, purpose, and function.

Stolorow et al. make a slip in their reply to my article. In their manuscript provided to me by the editor of this journal, upon which I was asked to respond, and before it had gone through any copyediting by the APA office and potentially changed by the authors’ during proof reviews, they specifically state the following:

After citing a claim by one of us (Stolorow, 1998) that “objective reality is unknowable by the psychoanalytic method” (quoted in Mills, 2005, p. 166), Mills notes that it is important for analysts to make objective judgments about such things as suicidality, and then faults “Stolorow [for] making an absolute claim . . . that ‘reality is unknowable’” (p. 167). Note Mills’s clever rhetorical device here of leaving out the crucial last four words of Stolorow’s claim: “*by the psychoanalytic method.*”

Notice that I *do* acknowledge his last four words in my article; yet they appear to have effaced this from their memory. I suppose this is a good example of how the unconscious is alive and well in their work; so my claim that they decenter the role of the unconscious is obviously overstated, to which they have my apology. It is only by accident, hence a faulty achievement, that they could have possibly overlooked such a crucial detail in their reply. What does this suggest? Perhaps Stolorow is the main author of their reply who is personally invested in defending his position to the

degree that he is not willing to entertain an objective fact—namely, that “objective reality” is knowable.

My main point in the article was to say that the psychoanalytic method, which is based on phenomenal interpretations of shared (albeit separately registered or organized) experience in the analytic encounter, can indeed allow us to render reasonably correct (objective) judgments independent of others’ subjective states of mind. Is Stolorow intimating in his criticism that some other method can indeed have epistemic access to objective reality that is foreclosed by psychoanalytic investigation? If so, then what is it? And even if this is his claim, why would we privilege such methodological practices over our own if they also rely on the senses, reason, and subjective interpretations of observable phenomena? When making objectivist claims about reality independent of the subject’s mind, all science interprets the natural world through the filter of human subjectivity. This does not negate the epistemic fact that we *can know* certain aspects of the natural world independent of the subject’s unique subjectivity that interprets it.

I agree with Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange that contextualizing is not nullifying, it only situates or demarcates a particular object of study, subject matter, or datum for observation, theoretical reflection, or critical inquiry. Yet there is always a dilemma to context, a discussion that lies beyond the scope of this response. I fully agree with my colleagues that “phenomena . . . are always and only grasped as dimensions of personal experiencing.” What else could phenomena be grasped by? We cannot step outside of our own minds, except only in theory or fantasy, yet this of course is mediated by mind. Regardless of our irreducible subjectivity, this does not necessarily mean that “objective reality is unknowable,” a debate we may leave for another time.

The biggest disagreement I have with my learned friends is their constant inaccurate

references to Freud's model of the mind as an "isolated Cartesian container." Not only do I think they need to brush-up on their Freud, I do not think that they truly understand Descartes' overall project. Stolorow et al., as well as Mitchell, constantly refer to terms that accuse Freud of adhering to a solipsistic and monadic theory of mind, when Freud neither believed nor stated any such thing in his writings. These are unwarranted conclusions. My colleagues appeal to Marcia Cavell as a premiere authority, a colleague whom I respect and have indeed published in one of my edited books, but this does not give them licence to conclude that there are no other ways of situating or interpreting Freud vis-a-vis Descartes. I know this sounds mean, but I find Stolorow et al.'s rendering of Descartes to be simplistic and naive, something one might find in an introductory philosophy textbook replete with inaccuracies and watered-down summations. In their recent collaboration, *Worlds of Experience* (2002), they barely engage what Descartes actually said in his texts, relying instead on secondary sources and commentaries, and as a result they misinterpret his project. Any Descartes scholar, and I am being kind in saying this, would find their interpretation of Descartes to be elementary at best.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Stolorow et al. maintain that the Cartesian mind is "estranged" from the external world, essentially alienated, sealed-off, and solipsistic, a philosophical proposition they extend to Freud. I doubt they have ever studied the *Meditations* with any precision. If they had I do not believe they could possibly make such sweeping generalizations. In my opinion, they fundamentally misunderstand what Descartes said and what he intended to convey. In the Synopsis to the *Meditations*, and in his letters of reply to his critics, Descartes clearly defends himself against the accusation that he is a solipsist. Rather, he is making a *categorical distinction* between the human soul or mind and the body—he is not saying that they are estranged or alienated from one another.

It is important to reiterate to the reader that I never stated that Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange “nullify” the unconscious, only that it is “subordinated” to intersubjective life. This is what I interpret to be their main thesis, even if I am not acquainted with everything they have written. Their suggestion that I am an emerging “defender of Cartesianism against the challenge of contextualism in psychoanalysis” shows that they are not familiar with my work, to which I hold

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Here the reader should know that, for Descartes, the body is extended in space and is part of the natural world, hence by Stolorow’s et al.’s interpretation they are completely separated. Descartes begins his meditations by using a skeptical, epistemological methodology of doubting everything as a tool to overturn unquestioned presuppositions of his time, only to conclude that he is certain of his own inner subjective processes and eventually the external world, but this does not mean that the inner and outer, subject-object, self and world are estranged from one another. On the contrary, he goes on to argue that mind and nature, psyche and substance, consciousness and reality are interconnected. Descartes (1984) specifically says in his Synopsis, summarizing the Sixth Meditation, that “the mind is proved to be really [categorically] distinct from the body, but is shown, notwithstanding, to be so closely joined to it that the mind and the body make up a kind of unit” (p. 11). In the Sixth Meditation, he further states that mental activity, such as “sensory perception and imagination, cannot be understood apart from some substance for them to inhere in, and hence cannot exist without it” (pp. 54-55). Here it is absolutely illegitimate to say, as Stolorow et al. do, that the mind is “estranged” from body, hence a part of the “natural world.” There are in fact many connections to the mind, body, and nature in Descartes’ overall philosophy—not just the subject matter of the *Meditations*—that challenge Stolorow et al.’s claims, the details of which are not important to make my point in this context.

them no fault. As an applied revisionist Hegelian, I have championed in many ways their project of explaining contextual complexity within a developmental monistic ontology that accounts for context to begin with. At the end of their reply, they rebuff me; but I think we can “engage in genuine conversation” if they are open to a meeting of minds.

My next series of replies is in response to Marilyn Jacobs’ discontent with my concerns of therapeutic excess reported in the relational literature. Jacobs is essentially charging me with a theory-method confound: namely, that I accuse relational theory—indeed the whole relational tradition—for “determining” the analyst’s behavior in the consulting room, concluding that I am saying that relational “theory” “prescribes” “unethical” behavior. First of all, nowhere in my text do I say such a thing because I believe, as she does, that theory and method are differentiated classifications, and that while they may certainly be interdependent, theory in itself does not necessarily “determine” a method or clinical course of action. In fact, she uses the word “suggests” in several places in her reply but she does not cite my actual words. Therefore, her entire refutation is based on a *non sequitur* that misattributes premises and propositional attitudes to my actual position that I do not hold, nor do I state in my article. As a result, her whole argument against me is based on something I do not say, hence it is groundless. That is not to say that her thoughtful points are not legitimate, for they most certainly are, only that they are wrongfully attributed to me. Jacobs can be reassured we are on the same page. Having said this, the issue she raises nevertheless sparks important questions for future inquiry amongst many different psychoanalytic schools.

As I argued, the relational tradition does not present nor possess a systematized view of psychoanalytic theory or practice. My critique was an attempt to give some form, coherency, and voice to a plurality of ideas and approaches that have been identified in some fashion with the

relational turn. Of course, any broad critique is bound to have partial success at best, because everyone's contributions to that literature base cannot be sufficiently addressed in the scope of an article. But Jacobs' assertions not only do not adequately convey my project, they also do not acknowledge my caveats and qualifications that I clearly define for the reader. When a subdiscipline such as the relational movement does not hold a unified theory or methodology, it is particularly open to different interpretations in both theory and practice. There are, consequently, larger degrees of discrepancy in freely translating theory into therapeutic action, let alone uniform technique, because un-systematization introduces more ambiguity than systematic thought and procedure. Analysts who are identified with any theory must decipher, interpret, and absorb certain conceptual schemas and convert them into directive principles that inform clinical action, regardless of whether the theory justifies the method or vice-versa. Theory informs method, but it does not "determine" method, a point Jacobs inaccurately attributes to me. In fact, it is important to retain a categorical distinction between the two because a method, in principle, should be able to be potentially applied to diverse and variegated theoretical frameworks that in turn may lend increasing conceptual complexity to explaining therapeutic action. Despite this qualification, adherents of any theoretical model advocate for certain interventions over others that may duplicate, simulate, overlap, oppose, or complement one another; resulting thereby in emphasizing some aspects while de-emphasizing others, or depart entirely from other technical practices based upon theoretical proclivities. If Jacobs is suggesting there exists a complete polarization of theory and method, then I think this is logically untenable.

There is a potential for misuse and abuse that exists with any teachings and in any training milieu, and this is certainly no different in contemporary analytic training environments where the

way one comes to subjectively interpret theory, which in turn effects their clinical practice, is influenced by faculty, training analysts, and supervisors who advocate for their own perspectives. Such positions may not be devoid of thoughtfulness, clinical judgment, expertise, and experience, but they are biased, necessarily so, by their preferences, caprices, and prejudices that oppose other credible points of view. To push this discussion further, I *do* believe, as Jacobs is likewise concerned about, that there is an “inherent risk” of therapeutic ambition in *any* psychoanalytic tradition, not just the relational movement. I am accentuating the issue here, in my discussion of therapeutic excess, involving some of the behaviors reported or observed by analysts identified with contemporary relational thought. Just because I draw attention to and question certain technical practices or theoretical tenets does not mean relational theory is decisively wrong; let alone do I claim it ethically condones or “prescribes” “unprofessional behavior,” as Jacobs accuses me of saying. The issue at hand, in this context, is how one interprets theory, not the theory itself.

Jacobs charges me with indicting the relational “tradition” itself when I in fact am alerting others to various behaviors I question as potentially excessive or overly ambitious, and which, I believe, we need to talk about more openly in professional space. Jacobs rightly points out that this is already happening in the relational field, a subject matter I was remiss not to be aware of. I am happy to be informed of this because these ongoing discussions are likely to be very fruitful for us all. But Jacobs is wrong to say that I am advocating that classical approaches cited in the works of Bion and Klein are “less likely to result in ethical violations,” when in fact a close reading of my actual text conveys the opposite. I unambiguously say that “what is clear is the authoritative tone, hubris, and brazen certainty with which Bion delivers his interpretations” and that Klein’s treatment

of her child analysis is “abusive and potentially traumatizing” (Mills, 2005, p. 181).

Jacobs is obviously upset, as is Pizer, that I report clinical events out of context, however, I specifically acknowledge this on several occasions. For instance, I state that: “If we were to focus only on the content of these interventions without taking into account the context and the overall process of treatment, then these enactments could be simply deemed unethical” (Mills, 2005, p. 179). One point I wanted to convey in my adumbrated and excerpted examples of “excess” is the overdetermined motivations and multiple implications embedded within an intervention. A careful reading of that section of my article will show both praise for the technical liberation the relational tradition has introduced as well as the potential for ethical concern and admonishment. The main issue here becomes a serious inquiry into the ground, breadth, and impediments to psychoanalytic method. This is an important area in the relational field that needs further discussion and debate, a subject that Jacobs and I are seemingly in agreement.

This brings us to the last commentary by Stewart Pizer, which is quite inflammatory to say the least. Pizer accuses me of using rhetorical ploys to discredit the relational school, and that I further make “unsubstantiated allegations” that have no “scholarly” merit or “evidence.” Pizer’s criticisms of my article begin with an abbreviated analysis of the alleged motives informing the formal structure and writing of my article, namely, that I wish to make the reader “paranoid” by arousing a “sense of danger” of a “relational takeover.” He then goes on to imply—but not deny—that the relational movement has no political agenda. I find this amusing since he signed his name as the President of the International Association for Relational Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy. Apparently he has not read Aristotle—“Man is a political animal.” He obviously would not have become the President of IARPP if he were not a good politician.

When Pizer does eventually start to address my arguments rather than attempt to psychoanalyze my motives, he admonishes me for not acknowledging the diversity of the relational literature, a common complaint Stolerow, Atwood, and Orange, Jacobs, and Pizer all share. As I stated earlier, these criticisms all conveniently omit my careful caveats, qualifications, and disclaimers outlining the scope and limits of my critique. Here Pizer is essentially saying: “Because you don’t quote me and my buddies, then your criticism is invalid.” So far Pizer is grasping at straws.

His next substantial criticism is to say that I don’t properly understand Mitchell’s views on embodiment because Mitchell appreciates and acknowledges the work of Loewald. Whether Mitchell’s later thought resonates with Loewald does not erase the fact that he built his relational theory on the denunciation of drives. I specifically quote Mitchell in several places in my critique where he unabashedly negates the primacy of the drives, hence the foundation of classical psychoanalytic theory, which is unquestionably grounded in the question and nature of embodiment. Pizer wants to challenge my interpretation of Mitchell’s meaning of desire when he states that: “*Desire is experienced always in the context of relatedness*”(Mitchell, 1988, p. 3, italics in original), which Pizer wants to chalk-up to a linguistic construct. But what he omits from Mitchell’s text is quite crucial, namely, that Mitchell aligns with the supposition that: “We are portrayed *not* as a conglomeration of physically based urges, but as being shaped by and inevitably embedded within a matrix of relationships with other people” (p. 3, italics added). While I agree with Mitchell’s last statement, as does Freud, why does Mitchell need to negate biology? Pizer then extends his challenge to absurdly ask why I don’t criticize Freud as well, who, like Mitchell, acknowledges the value of social relatedness. This is because Freud offers a holistic, coherent, and internally

consistent theoretical corpus that does not lend itself to the type of false dichotomies that Mitchell commits by making such overstatements under the guise of theoretical originality. What is further ironic is that Pizer accuses me of using Mitchell out of context to suit my own needs in order to build a straw man against Mitchell, when Mitchell himself has been fervently criticized for distorting previous psychoanalytic traditions, magnifying theoretical differences among schools when little or none exist, and using a variety of concepts out of context and selectively to suit his own theoretical needs (see Masling, 2003; Meissner, 1998; Richards, 1999; Silverman, 2000). The fact is that Mitchell was hell-bent on forging his “new” paradigm through negation rather than seeing how the old could positively inform the new. Perhaps this insight came later when Mitchell became enamored with Loewald, but it does not efface his earlier theoretical commitments that he put to pen.

Pizer pushes the issue of prioritizing relational experience while subordinating embodiment. He states that “an alternative point of view (closer to Mitchell’s) would argue for relational experience to be regarded as the basis of experience and for embodied experience to be contextualized in relational experience.” Notice Pizer says that relational experience is the “*basis of experience*” (italics added). Here he is saying essentially the same thing as Mitchell without considering the philosophical predicaments he generates. Pizer accuses me of dismissal as a denial of scholarly debate, when I see that he offers no philosophical defense of the mind-body problem that adequately accounts for mind-body dependence. According to most reasonable people I know, it is generally uncontested that: “If you ain’t got a body, you ain’t experiencing nothin’.” Pizer, Mitchell, Hoffman, and others may rightfully think they are “constructing” how they *conceive* of embodiment, which I do not object to nor see as problematic, but they are certainly not constructing

their material facticity *ex nihilo*. Embodiment logically and developmentally precedes “constructive,” linguistic thought. I think certain relationalists have more thinking to do on this subject.

Pizer’s criticisms become more caustic and personal. Moreover, he distorts what I actually say in my text. He charges me with diagnosing relationalists with a “pandemic narcissistic disorder.” Although I do believe a collective narcissism exists in any group of people, especially those who are over-identified with certain ideals that by definition oppose others, no where in my text do I charge the relational movement with a “narcissistic disorder.” But because of the way I have been treated by key people identified with this tradition, perhaps I should reconsider my position.

The most damning charges Pizer launches against me is that I violate the ethical code of professional conduct established by the American Psychological Association and that I have committed an illegal act. Very grave allegations indeed. Pizer accuses me of making “spurious and baseless allegations of ethical impropriety” against Barbara Pizer, which he further claims are “untrue” and “libelous.” He also “deplore[s] such a breach on the part of author and editorial staff.” First let me inform Pizer and the readership that Dr. Joseph Reppen is a man of principled integrity and would not condone unethical or libelous acts if he were aware of them as such. Secondly, my article was subjected to and passed a blind review process. Given that I serve on the editorial board of *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, I know that Reppen does not show favoritism when it comes to publishing articles. He uniformly sends submitted manuscripts to three blind reviewers and determines acceptances, revisions, and rejections based on the reviewers’ expertise. And if there are any errors or breaches that were made, they solely rest on the author’s shoulders.

But I have made no such breaches and I take full responsibility for what I claim in my article, i.e., that Barbara Pizer had “broken the confidentiality of a former analysand” by revealing that she was “sexually abused.” Stuart Pizer categorically denies this occurrence. He claims that he was a discussant of the paper she delivered at the Division 39 annual spring conference held in Minneapolis in 2003 and that there is “no reference” in her “paper” to these events. He then goes on to accuse me, once again, of a “libelous use of unpublished material” that I had no “permission” to use, which he further claims is an unethical “boundary violation.”

First of all, I do not need permission from an author to use material delivered in a public forum at a professional conference. Whether or not Barbara Pizer’s paper is appearing in a periodical, which is undoubtedly revised and expanded, is irrelevant. It does not delete the fact that certain statements were verbally made at a professional meeting. Secondly, accusations of a “boundary violation” are only applicable to a therapist-patient relationship. I neither need consent to quote material disclosed in professional space nor do I have any professional relationship with Barbara Pizer whatsoever, whom I do not know. These arguments are simply vacuous.

Pizer alludes to his suspicion that I may be reiterating gossip or hearsay with no substantial evidence to back it up, something he is uncertain of, yet he takes a gamble. He gives us a clue: “Was Mills there?” Yes, I was there. I witnessed the whole panel presentations and observed the audience’s reaction. I also talked with other colleagues after the presentations who were also present, which had generated quite a stir among informal discussions with others later that day. Not only did I witness such events, there are many others who can corroborate my narrative. But what is impossible to deny is an actual recording of what was said at the talk. Did Pizer forget that the whole event was taped? Because Pizer’s charges against me are so contemptuous, I am forced to

provide irrefutable evidence to clear me of such allegations. Here is what Barbara Pizer (2003) says in the transcript from her verbal presentation:

“Actually, the vignette I am about to relate comes from a brief treatment between Kate and myself that begins with a broken frame. I had gotten to know her in another context. I supervised her for two years beginning in 1988. At that time she came recommended to me by her colleagues; also by Ariel, her therapist, whom I had once known well and to whom I felt deeply attached, even though, given life’s circumstances, I had not spent time with her for over a decade. In the course of working with Kate, a gifted clinician herself, working with deeply disturbed patients, I came to learn of her own traumatic past, which included severe neglect, sexual abuse, repeated abandonment, and ultimately a hospitalization . . . Kate felt finally rescued by Ariel.”

Pizer goes on to explain that 14 years after their supervisory relationship had ended, Kate called her in a frantic state concerning Ariel, still Kate’s therapist, who had unanticipatedly suffered a stroke. Kate was immediately plummeted into crisis and sought out Pizer for help. The therapeutic work, which lasted for a few months, delved into Kate’s multiple traumas and psychic fragmentation associated with, among other things, Ariel’s illness and abandonment of her, as well as the uncertainty surrounding Ariel’s prognosis and recovery. Pizer focuses on a particular intervention she delivered while Kate was dissociating in session. Here is what Pizer tells the audience:

“Heart in mouth, I do something I have never done or ever wish to do again. I say that in spite of current circumstances, there is in fact an underlying continuity containing us here, and now is the time to speak out loud about it. I tell Kate that way

back in the seventies when Ariel was still a psychology student in training, we were engaged in a process similar to the process that she has been engaged in with Ariel.

Ariel was my analysand.”

Recall that Stewart Pizer says in his reply that there is “no reference in B. Pizer’s paper to her former analysand being sexually abused.” What he appears to be trying to do in his negation is to subvert the issue of his wife’s boundary violation—of breaking her former patient’s confidentiality—by throwing a red herring to the readership and accusing me of unethical behavior and libel. Although I concede that Barbara Pizer did not use those exact words in her paper, for which I stand corrected, she nevertheless did communicate, in her own words, that she had told her current patient that the patient’s previous analyst was at one time Pizer’s analysand. Moreover, she told the patient that her previous analyst went through a similar process in her therapy with Pizer. The current patient had a trauma history including “sexual abuse” and was a previous supervisee of Pizer’s. In my opinion, it is very reasonable to conclude that if my analyst had told me that my previous analyst was her patient in the past, and that my previous analyst went through a similar process that I went through in the moment of reliving painful traumatic material in session, I would immediately conclude that my previous analyst was also a victim of sexual abuse. Although Pizer informs us that Kate returned to continue her therapy with Ariel when she had recovered from her rehabilitation, and that they both expressed gratitude and reassurance that Pizer did not do them any harm, it still does not annul the fact that Barbara Pizer broke the rule of confidentiality that governs the practice of our profession.

My brief mention of Barbara Pizer’s therapeutic action in my article was in the larger context of the question of therapeutic excess: It was not an attack on Barbara Pizer per se. In fact, despite her betrayal of her previous patient’s trust, to me her intentions portray a genuine care and anguish

for her current patient's suffering. She was emotionally compelled to say these words in a moment of therapeutic crisis where two people were palpably distressed. She appeared to respond authentically following her own clinical intuition. Was this countertransference? I will let the reader decide.

For the record, I am not making any ethical charge against Barbara Pizer for what she said at the conference regarding her therapeutic disclosures, nor am I showing any malice or ill-will toward her or anyone else in the relational field for simply taking their words seriously. I have critiqued people who I find have something of value to say, even if my disagreements have generated bad feelings. If I did not think these issues were important, then I would not have been bothered wasting my time commenting on their work. My intent is to stimulate noteworthy attention and serious debate about these ideas and practices so our profession can continue to prosper and advance.

A fact has no intent or motive, although it is value-laden. In my opinion, a fact is none other than the conveyance of an event or occurrence. A transcript does not lie. Why would Stuart Pizer maintain such an omnipotent stance of denial in the face of evidence to the contrary? His actions appear to be motivated by a brazen attempt to intimidate me through fear in order to avenge his wife's shame and cover up the deed to save face. What is obvious is that he is defending his wife and the camp he is identified with out of honor. Although this may be viewed by some to be a noble act, I find it clearly misguided in this forum, which is at the expense of my professional reputation. He surely must think his wife made a mistake and is in need of protection, for he would not have drawn such attention to this issue through a public showdown, which is nothing but a baseless counterattack by smearing my name to detract from the real issue at hand.

Pizer says he is left “spinning” by both my praise and indictment of the relational school, invoking Shakespeare to lend profundity to his refutation by *ad hominem*. I am reminded here of Frederick Crews, who, in response to his acrimonious critics, pointed out that no one seemed to respond to his arguments because they were too busy slashing his character. Is this what contemporary psychoanalysis has amounted to—personality worship and self-aggrandizement in a self-congratulatory fraternity among friends—at the expense of legitimate self-critique and intellectual honesty? I hope not, but my critique of the relational school has unfortunately led to some radically unrelational behavior by some analysts whom I admire in principle but no longer respect.

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