

less and would violate the code. Such activity would not serve the best interests of our vital, engaged profession or of our patients. We can never abandon our core principles in light of any political activism; anyone doing so needs to be called to account.

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Author's Response: Who's Afraid of Politics? Or, Psychotherapists as Political Entities

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It is a pleasure for me to take part in this fascinating debate. When I submitted the transcript for "Politics and Israeli psychologists: Is it time to take a stand?" I did not imagine that it would ignite such a vibrant and rich discussion. To a large extent my purpose is fulfilled. Still, some clarifications are required.

First, let us make sure that the discussion is based on similar basic definitions. It seems that this is not the case here. The most central definition at issue is that of the term "politics." Zemishlany defines politics as "the art or science of government"; this is the traditional and narrow meaning of the term. It seems that Strous referred to the term "politics" in a similar fashion. However, this is not the meaning I assign to the term. Politics in its wider sense deals with the pushes and pulls of a person or a group over other/s. Hence, it has to do with relations in which power is present, overtly or latently. Therefore, politics may reveal itself within very personal and intimate rela-

tionships. According to this wider definition, a political action may very well be an act of an individual and may not take place within the public sphere. Additionally, positioning relationships of all kinds within a broader context of time, place and society is in fact an act of revealing of the political within the personal. Similarly, therapists who take into account their own (gender, national, cultural, socio-economical, etc.) background and are aware of possible power relations within the psychotherapeutic work are politically aware.

The second key definition is psychotherapy. It seems that the dispute in the present discussion is over its definition. Indeed, as Totton remarks, "once we turn to 'psychotherapy' itself, however, we find that defining the term itself is a political act, rising thoroughly political questions" (1). Some relevant fundamental questions are: What is the nature of psychotherapy? What are its goals? What are its le-

gitimate means? And so on. These questions may affect the political field and are affected by it.

In his commentary, Strous draws a sharp distinction between psychology and politics. According to him “entering into political activity and discourse would constitute a violation of these (ethical, N. A.) standards.” The only exception to the rule of “separation of powers doctrine” is “political psychology” which is a “very legitimate and respectable sub-affiliate of the discipline.” Let it be noted that this conception of psychotherapy as apolitical is not indispensable; psychotherapy may also be thought of and conceptualized as being inherently political. This is not a theoretical or hypothetical assertion, rather it is an actual possibility. Elsewhere I reviewed the more salient examples of political involvement of psychotherapists in the 20th century and examined them within their historical and political context (2). As I tried to demonstrate in “Politics and Israeli psychologists,” we have our little exceptions too. In my view, politics and psychotherapy are virtually interwoven. The interrelations between the two are so complex as to undermine this distinction altogether.

Examining the interrelations between psychotherapy and politics, one may discern numerous linkages and examples. Totton uses a four axes matrix to present the realm of psychopolitics in a manageable coherent way: Psychotherapy *in* politics, Psychotherapy *of* Politics, Politics *in* Psychotherapy and Politics *of* Psychotherapy. These four categories are not exclusive; indeed they are closely related and sometimes overlapping. Still, within this wide range I choose to focus on “Psychotherapy *in* politics.” Here, the therapists transcend the conventional scope of content and enter the political arena, seeking to facilitate change. More importantly, in this case therapists transcend the conventional scope of action; they take a certain socio-political role that entails different sets of means and guidelines. In other words, therapists who are engaged in such activities “soil their hands” in actual political action for the sake of changing an unjust or harmful reality.

I agree with Strous that there are dangers in being politically active. Yet, I believe that the dangers in the opposing position (i.e., denial or avoidance of the political) are greater. Strous mentions the period of the Nazi regime to demonstrate “the perils of mental health involvement in politics.” However, the analy-

sis of the different political stands taken by mental health professionals in this period of time may serve both claims. One may suggest, as Stein does (3), that Freud’s political neutrality vis à vis the Nazi regime (for the sake of “rescuing psychoanalysis”) turned out to be devastating for psychoanalysis in Germany. The Netherlands Psychoanalytic Society, on the other hand, resisted the Nazis (i.e., was politically active) and by that remained morally intact. I do not wish to elaborate on this point here. Still, it is quite clear that the question at issue, the heart of the present controversy, is which mode of action is preferable — morally and therapeutically; which principle enables us to contribute to the well-being of people(s), with minimal damage. Abuse of any position is always a possibility. I suspect that the avoidance of the political, within and outside the clinic, may very well turn out to be harmful. I suppose that being aware of political forces (including one’s own political stands) reduces the possibility of being manipulated by them.

Here is an example for the avoidance of politics. Zemishlany opens his concluding paragraph with the following words: “Mental health professionals are not politicians and should not be involved, as a group, in political solutions for the prolonged and violent conflict in our region.” What I believe Zemishlany fails to realize is that this is a political stand as well. This statement may reflect a specific kind of involvement in the political arena. In this case the stance is passive and helpless. This political stance is contradictory to overt therapeutic values, primarily that of change. Earlier in his commentary Zemishlany specifies three “legitimate” channels for the contribution of mental health professionals to the society, with which I fully identify. For me, all three channels signify political involvement and may have political impact. Still, I find it quite puzzling that Zemishlany avoids the term politics, even when he addresses its more narrow and conventional meaning and encourages “Cooperation with other professionals and with those who are working to promote peace, including politicians and media.” So, perhaps the difference in positions is not so drastic after all.

By the way, both Zemishlany and Strous (respectively) point out that “politics and social issues, however, are not synonymous and to take a political

stand is different from being involved in social process” and that “political activism by mental health clinicians would be divisive, damaging and unethical; community activism in the context of voluntary contributions to society however would be desirable and honorable.” I would like to comment on what I regard as a fallacious dichotomy between social and political, by sharing a relevant anecdote. A few years ago, when I started to look into the first Intifada and focused on the psychological aspects of it, I searched the two leading Hebrew psychological journals: “Sichot” and “Psychologia.” To my surprise I did not find any relevant reference in the volumes published between 1988 and 1991; not even a single article dealing with the Intifada or relating to it. But then I was surprised once again. Once the Gulf War broke out, both journals published special issues. The war and its consequences were all over the place. How come? I believe that the fact that the Gulf War was clearly located within the Israeli consensus, whereas the Intifada was clearly not, is responsible for the difference in the psychological community’s reaction to these political events. In a similar fashion, the term “social” lies within the consensus; it is neither conflictual nor controversial, whereas “politics” is both; in other words, it is dangerous. Perhaps this is the reason for therapist’ avoidance of the political field as well as of the term politics itself.

I believe that if we are to challenge the conventional definition of psychotherapy, we need to legitimize the term politics within the therapeutic discourse. Let us be reminded that psychology and politics share similar aspirations: to facilitate change processes and to promote well-being, safety and prosperity. Also, psychology relates to individuals who are part of the collective to which politics pertains. Inasmuch as the “clientele” of both disciplines are associated, the practices are related too. Politics may foster well-being just as much as psychotherapy may have a political impact. Or, as Andrew Samuels put it: “Psychotherapy can contribute to a general transformation of politics. Therapists... can try to transform self-concern into social and political concern, thereby helping revitalize politics” (4).

I believe that we are all political entities, even if we happen to be psychotherapists. Being politically aware may lead to political activism, but it may just as well mean no more than this: being aware of one’s position and of the specific context of the therapeutic encounter. In both cases politics is not denied and its power over us, as therapists, is lessened. Allow me to paraphrase Strous’s major point and claim that **not** entering into political activity and discourse would constitute a violation of professional and moral standards. Extensive avoidance of the political field may mean just that: participating in the perpetuation of the status quo and passively taking part in the conservation of human suffering. Torture (to use Strous’s example) may become possible only if one ignores the political aspects of the profession and maintains a more narrow and technical perception of the profession, detached of its historical, cultural and political contexts. For me, being politically aware or active does not mean to “risk that trust” given to us by society, but rather to strengthen it. I believe that this is the kind of modeling psychologists (and other therapists) fail to deliver these days, congruous and consistent with their verbal messages. Instead we convey mixed messages and create double-bind situations. Perhaps this is the reason for the continual wear in the Israeli psychologists’ status. I believe it has to do with a lack of trust caused by our passivity and general unconcern in social and political issues. Or, to paraphrase Strous once again: It is precisely mental health care providers who should be acutely sensitive to the conditions of life and to their causes, including the political, social, legal, and so forth.

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