

Editorial: Personality Matters: A Special Issue in Honor of Sidney J. Blatt

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Abstract: This special issue in honor of Sidney J. Blatt includes a collection of articles written by his Israeli friends, colleagues and former students. Blatt, a professor of Psychology and Psychiatry at Yale University, a senior psychoanalyst at the Western/New-England Psychoanalytic Institute in New Haven, Connecticut, and a world-renowned clinician, theoretician, and investigator, has made an invaluable contribution to the understanding of personality processes in development, psychopathology, and the therapeutic process, as well as to Israeli clinical psychology and psychiatry. Articles in this special issue relate Blatt's work to the author's findings regarding mental representations of self-and-others, suicide and self-destructive behavior, depressive personality styles, adolescent development, personality assessment, and evidence-based treatment. An interview with Blatt, and his response to the articles in his honor, conclude this special issue.

There are two good reasons to launch this special issue in honor of Sidney J. Blatt: one is more conceptual in nature, the other particularly pertinent to the Israeli situation. The more conceptual reason is that the theoretical and empirical work of Blatt, extended over more than five extremely productive decades, teaches us about the formidable role of personality processes in normal development, psychopathology, and the outcome, and process, of mental health treatment, both psychological and pharmacological. In an era in which biological psychiatry on the one hand, and the focus on brief, manualized psychotherapies on the other hand, dominate our profession, Blatt's legacy serves as a crucial reminder that it is the *person*, with her particular way of making sense of herself and the work around her, who suffers, is the one who needs help, and is the one who will ultimately respond — or not — to our interventions. Without taking the *person* into account, our conceptualization of mental suffering and its treatment runs a serious risk of being highly reductionistic, and therefore erroneous and ineffective. In contrast, incorporating theory and research

on basic personality processes purports to increase markedly our understanding of the multi-causal nature of psychopathology, and to the employment of person(ality)-sensitive procedures for assessment and treatment.

In particular, Blatt's theory and research promise to sensitize the clinical practitioner-researcher to the key role played by mental representations of self and others in the (dis)regulation of cognition, affect and behavior, as well as to individual differences in the emphasis people place on interpersonal relatedness vs. self-definition and self-esteem. As compellingly demonstrated in a host of research findings (see, for instance, 1), maladaptive and incoherent mental representations of self-and-others, or object relations, predispose individuals to a host of adaptation problems and to severe psychopathology, and restrict these individuals' ability to gain from treatment. Conversely, essentially positive, albeit realistic, coherent, and psychologically flexible representations bolster normal development and serve as a resource during treatment (2). Related to his theory and research on mental representations, Blatt's theory of

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interpersonal relatedness and self-definition demonstrates compellingly that our lives are woven around the need to secure warm, close, stable and supportive interpersonal relatedness, combined with the need to establish a positive, clearly delineated sense of self. An overemphasis on one of these psychological vectors at the expense of the other leads to anaclitic-dependent and introjective-self-critical personality organizations, which in turn predispose individuals to specific psychopathological constellations and distinct responses to treatment (3-5).

The second reason to launch a special issue in honor of Sidney J. Blatt is his steadfast support of Israel in general and of Israeli clinical psychology and psychiatry in particular. At a time in which Israeli universities and academics are being boycotted and ostracized, particularly in Europe, Blatt's intense connection to Israel and his support of Israeli scholars' career development is nothing less than moving. Indeed, this connection is not new. Ever since his service as the Freud Chair at the Hebrew University in 1988-9, Sidney Blatt has been working very closely, mentoring, advising and publishing with numerous Israeli psychologists and psychiatrists, some of whom now occupy leading position in Israeli academia and its mental health establishment. It is therefore only fitting that we in Israel would be eager to find a way to thank one of our greatest champions. As guest editors, we would like to thank Prof. David Greenberg, *IJP* editor, for allowing us, indeed encouraging us, to do so by means of launching this special issue in honor of Sid Blatt.

As per Editor Greenberg's request, this special issue constitutes not only a tribute, but also an opportunity to get immersed in some of the most central questions occupying international and Israeli mental health. To that aim, we solicited articles from senior Israeli mental health researchers, all of whom are closely familiar with Blatt's writings, and encouraged these authors to discuss their own work and to link it to theory and research on mental representations, the anaclitic and introjective configurations, psychological development, psychopathology and mental health treatment. Each of the articles submitted was then reviewed by one of us, as well as by a blind international reviewer who is an expert in the topic addressed by the putative article. Opening this special issue is an article by Beatriz Priel, Avi Besser,

and their colleagues, which reviews and interprets previous studies that utilized Blatt's conceptualization of mental representations of significant others in researching parental representations in children. This review is carried out through looking at the dynamics between actual interpersonal experiences and intrapersonal processes as well as cultural influences. The various studies reviewed used a children's version of the Object Relations Inventory (ORI) by Blatt and colleagues (6) to assess parental mental representations (7). The authors emphasize the urgent need for systematic studies of continuity and change of mental representations, in order to enhance the understanding of the roles of interpersonal and intrapersonal factors in the formation of mental representations in children.

Israel Orbach from the Department of Psychology of Bar-Ilan University then presents his voluminous work on self-destructive processes and suicide, and links it to findings by Blatt and colleagues on self-criticism. Orbach delineates the self-destructive internal processes involved in suicidal behavior from three perspectives: theoretical, empirical and clinical. From a theoretical point of view, different thinkers and their contribution to the understanding of suicide are reviewed. Among them is Blatt and his concepts of self-critical depression and destructive perfectionism. The empirical aspects of suicidal internal processes are also outlined, among them the implementation in suicidal behavior of Blatt's two types of depression: self-critical and introjective. The negative suicidal outcomes of perfectionism can also be seen in clinical case descriptions. It is of importance that while some researchers in the field emphasize specific external adversities in forming the circumstances that lead to suicidal behavior, Orbach stresses the significance of self-destructive internal processes of which the eroding effects create intolerable mental pain that eventually leads to suicide.

Next, Hadas Wiseman, Alon Raz and Ruth Sharabany investigate the way Blatt's personality prototypes may account for the interpersonal problems of young adults with difficulties in establishing long-term romantic relationships. This was executed by means of a two-dimensional model of interpersonal problems, comprised of affiliation and dominance. These young adults, as well as young adults who were successful in achieving long-term intimate

relationships, completed the Depressive Experiences Questionnaire (8) as well as questionnaires tapping onto mental health and interpersonal problems. Interpersonal problems were also measured by a friend's evaluation. As hypothesized, the authors found that both self-criticism and dependency were related to greater self-reported interpersonal distress, while controlling for psychological distress (depression and anxiety), and that efficacy moderated the effects of these vulnerabilities. In addition, self-criticism contributed to the friend's report of interpersonal distress only for those without difficulties in long-term romantic relationships. The findings are discussed in terms of Blatt's theory on interpersonal relatedness and self-definition in young adults' personality development and the complementary ways the personality styles influence the interpersonal world.

Ada Zohar's article comes next, and focuses on the comparison between Blatt's model of personality and that of Robert Cloninger, as well as their relationship to depression and psychopathology. The two theories arose in different contexts and disciplines: The Blatt theory is known mainly to psychoanalysts, clinical psychologists and research psychologists with interests in depression and in development. The Cloninger theory is known mostly to psychiatrists, and to psychologists and researchers who are interested in the interface between biology and behavior. However, they provide interesting contrasts and surprising commonalities. Each of the theories is outlined, the theoretical foundations of it presented, as well as some central aspects for comparison: the theory's view on personality stability and its relation to psychopathology, the theory's efficacy at predicting depression from personality measures, the theory's explanation for sex differences in depression, the measures derived from the theories, and clinical implications as well as overall theory productivity. The paper concludes with an analysis of correspondences and divergences between the two theories, and a suggestion for future research.

The next article is by Nirit Soffer and Golan Shahar from Ben-Gurion University, and its focus is on the role of personality and individual differences in evidence-based mental health practice. While generally supportive of the evidence-based movement, Soffer and Shahar do point out this move-

ment's relative neglect of the role of patients' pre-treatment personality in the outcome and process of psychotherapeutic and pharmacological interventions. As argued by Soffer and Shahar, this neglect is particularly alarming given the impending mental health reform in Israel, with its focus on economic, cost-containment consideration and what appears to be its disregard for the role of the person in treatment. To illustrate this role, Soffer and Shahar describe research findings from three evidence-based mental health trials. The first is the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) sponsored Treatment for Depression Collaborative Research Program (NIMH-TDCRP), in which state-of-the-art psychotherapies, as well as a then prevalent tricyclic antidepressant pharmacotherapy, for unipolar depression were compared to a placebo plus clinical management condition in the context of a Randomized Clinical Trial. The second is the Partnership Project, a community-based Randomized Clinical Trial examining the effectiveness of a partnership-based rehabilitation for people with severe, and largely psychotic, mental illness. The third was a naturalistic comparison between classical psychoanalysis and supportive-expressive psychotherapy, which was conducted as part of the now classic Menninger Psychotherapy Research Project. As reviewed by Soffer and Shahar, findings from these trials, including those produced by Blatt, Zuroff, Davidson, Shahar and their colleagues, clearly implicate individuals' personality as a paramount predictor of outcome, often more so than the specific treatment modalities employed.

Following Soffer and Shahar's article is a unique document: Lilly Dimitrovsky's interview with Sidney J. Blatt. The interview, conducted as part of Prof. Dimitrovsky's qualitative research on master therapists, enables a first hand access to Blatt's work as a clinician, inspired by his unique training in humanistic and psychoanalytic approaches. This interview is then followed by Blatt's response to the various articles in this special issue.

In the course of this process, we were heartened by the authors' eager cooperation. We would like to thank these authors, and also to re-thank Editor Greenberg for his diligence and persistence in the course of putting forth this special issue, as well as on his insistence of maintaining the high standards of

the IJP throughout this process. We are very happy with the final product, which, we believe, construes personality psychology as a major avenue for mental health theory, research and practice. We hope that the reader concurs and enjoys.

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