

EVENT REVIEWS**THE WORLD'S LARGEST PSYCHOTHERAPY
GATHERING**

Ulkar Isayeva

(Khazar University, Baku, Azerbaijan)

The Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference, which is considered the most important conference in the history of psychotherapy, was first organized in 1985 as a celebration of the 100th birthday of psychotherapy by Jeffrey Zeig, Ph.D., Director and Founder of The Milton H. Erickson Foundation. The Milton H. Erickson Foundation is mainly working on training health and mental health professionals worldwide. The biggest conference this foundation organizes is The Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference, which is acknowledged by the most successful specialists and attracts mental health professionals from all over the world. The first faculty of The Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference in 1985 included such well-known names as Carl Rogers, Albert Ellis, Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Jay Haley, James Masterson, and Virginia Satir. According to Jeffrey Zeig, earlier conferences were more academic with printed proceedings, while today the conference has evolved to become more clinical, organized around practice oriented workshops and interactive events.

The faculty of The Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference in 2009 included many famous and influential people in the field of psychotherapy. Albert Bandura, David Marlow, Aaron Beck, Salvador Minuchin, Claudia Black, Deepak Chopra, Otto F. Kernberg, Cloe Madanes, Donald Meichenbaum, Christine A.Padesky, Robert Sapolsky, Irvin Yalom and many others were members of the honorable faculty who took part in the 2009 conference. The conference program consisted of a great number of workshops, point/counterpoints, keynote speakers, clinical demonstrations, topical panels, conversation hours, dialogues, guest addresses, master classes and book signings.

The organizer of the conference is also the founder and director of the Milton H. Erickson Foundation. In addition to The Evolution of Psychotherapy Conferences, he organizes the Brief Therapy Conferences, the Couples Conferences, and the International Congresses on Ericksonian Approaches to Hypnosis and Psychotherapy. He is also the president of Zeig, Tucker & Theised, Inc., publishers in the behavioral sciences. In addition to the

conferences he arranges and international workshops he conducts, he is also engaged in private psychological practice in Phoenix, Arizona.

The pre-conference day started with the “Change your brain – Change your life” workshop presented by Daniel Amen. This lecture was one of the most impressive and outstanding events throughout the conference. Amen is a physician, psychiatrist, brain imaging specialist, Distinguished Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, and the CEO and medical director of Amen Clinics, Inc. in Newport Beach and Fairfield, California, Tacoma, Washington and Reston, Virginia. He is the author of 35 professional articles, four book chapters and 22 books, including the New York Times bestseller, “Change your Brain, Change your Life”.

Dr. Amen started the lecture by discussing 9 brain centered principles to change a person's brain and life. He stated that the brain is involved in everything a person does and when your brain works right, you work right. He then talked about the structure of the brain, emphasizing that it is the most complex organ in the human body consisting of 100 billion nerve cells. He also pointed out that the brain is very soft and is housed in a hard skull. After discussing the structure of the brain he informed the audience about many things that can hurt the brain, including drugs, alcohol, stress, sleep deprivation, negative thinking, smoking, excessive caffeine, too much television, environmental toxins, and brain injuries. Many things that can help the brain were also named, including social connections, new learning, a healthy diet, vitamins, fish oil, exercise, dancing, gratitude, meditation, and making love. Imaging was presented as an essential tool to help people who suffer because the brain can always change with the correct intervention (and be hurt by incorrect intervention). At the end of his remarkable lecture, Dr. Amen presented 10 simple steps to help people live longer, look younger, be thinner, and decrease the risk for Alzheimer's disease, depression, heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

The next pre-conference workshop was presented by Andrew Weil, MD, who defined healthy aging and talked about the most important strategies for achieving it. Then Robert Sapolsky, PhD, who is a professor of biology and neurology at Stanford University and a research associate with the Institute of Primate Research at the National Museum of Kenya, lectured about the biology and psychology of depression, about stress, and about where stress-related diseases come from. Dr. Sapolsky, who was awarded Rockefeller University's Lewis Thomas Prize for Writing about Science in 2008, was described as “one of the finest natural history writers around” by The New York Times.

During the next few days, which were the central days of the conference, different lecturers presented their workshops and speeches. The topics of their

lectures ranged from psychoanalysis to cognitive-behavioral therapy, post traumatic stress disorders to personality disorders, and individual therapy to couples and family therapy. All the lectures and workshops contained something new and interesting for psychologists attending the conference to gain knowledge about. The rest of my article will attempt to describe and analyze a few impressive and memorable lectures I was able to attend.

The first workshop I participated in was given by Otto F. Kernberg, MD, who described strategies, techniques and tactics in Transference-Focused Psychotherapy for the treatment of patients with Borderline Personality Disorder. Borderline Personality Disorder is a personality disorder with a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects, and marked impulsivity beginning by early adulthood (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – IV-TR, 2000). It was very interesting to listen to such a unique point of view from Otto Kernberg about the organization, characteristics and treatment of BPD. He is the director of the Personality Disorders Institute at the New York Presbyterian Hospital, Westchester Division, and Professor of Psychiatry at the Weill Medical College of Cornell University. Dr. Kernberg is also a former-president of the International Psychoanalytic Association, author of twelve books, and co-author of twelve others. His lecture at the conference was centered on the effectiveness of Transference-Focused Psychotherapy in the treatment of BPD. He stated that transference is the activation of internal object relations in the relationship with the therapist and that these internalized relations with significant others are not literal representations of past relations; rather they are modified by fantasies and defenses. Therefore, a therapist should experience and tolerate the confusion of the patient's inner world as it unfolds in the transference. Next, the therapist should identify in his mind the object relation that is dominant in the moment. Then the whole relationship is played out as were performed with actors to see the patient's reaction. With the help of this transference the patient identifies with the whole relationship, not just one side of it. Technical neutralities, tactics, priorities of intervention and even threats to the therapy were outlined. Clinical examples and illustrations given by Dr. Kernberg served to strengthen the discussion.

One of most memorable and sympathetic presenters at the conference was Cloe Madanes, a world-renowned teacher of psychotherapy and one of the originators of the strategic approach to family therapy. She has authored seven books that are classics in the field, won multiple awards for distinguished contributions to psychology, lectured and given numerous keynote addresses nationally and internationally, and has counseled outstanding individuals from all walks of life, from presidents of companies to senators, artists, and

bestselling authors. Currently, she is the director of the Madanes Institute in La Jolla, California.

Cloe Madanes gave several lectures and workshops throughout the conference, but one of them was of particular interest and practicality to everyone. In a workshop which was named "How to Change Relationships", Ms. Madanes presented a theoretical framework and tools that therapists can use to understand how relationships need to change in order to solve the problem presented in therapy. She presented a few of her favorite strategies and illustrated them with case examples and with experiential exercises. She stated that the most effective way to help a person is to change the person's social context. Madanes talked about the importance of creating a calm atmosphere at the beginning of couples therapy by starting a session with two minutes of silent meditation about the love that has brought the two people together. Then she highlighted the significance of creating boundaries in the relationships between people, such as parent-child, parent-parent etc. This implies that parents should have activities that children are not involved in and vice versa. Then she talked about the strategy called "coaching" which means training the patients to acquire some good characteristics that could help their relationships; e.g. to be more interesting or understanding. She then went on to discuss the idea of rituals, which in her opinion have spiritual components. Therefore, adopting the practice of some family rituals could be helpful for couples to reminisce about their good memories. It is useful to have couples renew their vows or send them off to have one last good weekend together before actually getting divorced because it could take people back to the core of their love. After telling the therapists about their good memories together, couples are asked to create one new memory to treasure in the following two weeks. Madanes also pointed out that it is exciting and very effective to use the strategy called "fines". This means that after one of the partners displays unwanted behavior, he should pay money or use some other kind of penalty as a fine. After teaching all these and other strategies, Cloe Madanes demonstrated an experiential exercise with a couple she picked from the audience in order to find out how compatible they are and how they should reprioritize their basic needs in life to harmonize with each other.

Another lecture I want to discuss is "Treatment of Individuals with Anger Control Problems: Life-Span Treatment Approach", a workshop presented by Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D. Dr. Meichenbaum, a founder of Cognitive Behavioral Modification, was voted one of the ten most influential psychotherapists of the century by North American clinicians in a survey reported in *American Psychologist*. He is a distinguished Professor Emeritus at University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada and Research Director of the Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention in Miami, Florida.

In his workshop he first presented a dynamic cascade model of the development of aggressive behavior. Then he expounded on the aggressive behavior of children, youth, and their families by providing treatment methods for a juvenile offender. The common situations that make individuals angry were analyzed as well. These included interruption of planned activities and obstacles to goal-directed behaviors, concern about possible injury to others or to self, overload of fatigue and stress, embarrassment, and others. Dr. Meichenbaum argued that it is vital for the therapist to educate the patient about the components and functions of anger and its relationship to aggression, in order to distinguish between “healthy” and “disturbed” forms of anger. Then he suggested that therapist should help the patient identify the chain of angry emotions, thoughts, and behaviors during the therapy and obtain information about specific anger-evoking triggers. After determining all this information, it is essential to teach patients how to manage physiological arousal and learn to lower bodily tension, develop emotional regulation and self-control skills, take constructive action against precipitants of anger whenever possible, and employ distraction and emotional palliative coping techniques when no constructive action is possible.

The last lecture I want to mention is a speech called “Moral Disengagement” given by Albert Bandura and Cloe Madanes. Dr. Albert Bandura, one of the most prominent psychologists of all time is currently a professor of psychology at Stanford University and former president of the American Psychological Association. In the world of psychology he is best known for his substantial theories such as Observational Learning, Social Learning Theory, and Self-Efficacy. The presentation addressed how otherwise good people can do cruel things. Different mechanisms by which people disengage moral self-sanctions from detrimental conduct were described. Also, the lecturers listed the social conditions that foster moral disengagement.

It is impossible not to mention two interesting events that took place at the conference. The biggest conference hall was entirely filled by the attendees of the conference in order to listen to Aaron Beck and Salvador Minuchin. The presence of these significant names captured the interest of all participants, and everyone was very eager listen to whatever they would say and to be part of the discussion. Aaron Beck is a psychiatrist and currently a Professor Emeritus in the Department of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. He is also the President of the Beck Institute for Cognitive Therapy and Research and the Honorary President of the Academy of Cognitive Therapy. He is widely accepted as a father of cognitive therapy and developer of self-report measures of depression and anxiety, including Beck Depression Inventory, Beck Hopelessness Scale, Beck Scale for Suicidal Ideation, Beck Anxiety Inventory, and Beck Youth Inventories. He is author and co-author of more than 375 articles and 13 books. He was unable to attend the conference itself due to some

personal issues; however, a video conference was prepared with huge screens in the conference hall in order to have a live interview with Dr. Beck. The most interesting part of that interview was Aaron Beck being interviewed by his own daughter, Judith Beck, a psychologist who is the Director of the Beck Institute for Cognitive Therapy. One very simple, yet very important remark from that interview was Dr. Beck's advice to psychotherapists to "adapt the therapy to a person, instead of trying to adapt the person to the therapy". Another interesting statement that I remember best from the conference is a comment Albert Bandura made on psychology being affected by biology more and more each day: "We should be psychologizing biology rather than biologizing psychology".

After the interview with Aaron Beck, another great contributor to psychology, Salvador Minuchin, took the stage to give a lecture and answer questions. Salvador Minuchin is a family therapist who developed Structural Family Therapy. In 2007, a survey of 2,600 psychology practitioners named Minuchin as one of the ten most influential therapists of all time. He has been a Research Professor of Psychiatry at New York University and Professor of Child Psychiatry and Pediatrics at the University of Pennsylvania.

In December 2009, in Anaheim, California, the largest gathering in the world of psychotherapy, The Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference, took place. Coined as one of the most important and interesting psychological conferences in the world, The Evolution of Psychotherapy Conference is held every 5 years and attracts over 6000 people who are in psychotherapy the field. The main feature of the conference is that the biggest names of contemporary psychology, and probably the living legends of the psychology field, share their experiences and ideas in their lectures, workshops, and master classes. This was the first time I attended this conference (at which I was the only psychotherapist in attendance from Azerbaijan), and the impression it left on me was outstanding. All possible topics in psychotherapy were discussed by specialists and even the creators of those theories and approaches. The debates of prominent specialists were of a special interest, because hearing contradictory ideas and reflecting on them while discussing them with others broadened the attendees' view about many concepts of psychotherapy. It was a pleasure to introduce Khazar University Psychological Counseling and Psychotherapy Center as the first professional psychological center in Azerbaijan and to build possible collaborations with world-renowned psychologists.