BAD FEELINGS
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The Contemporary Kleinians of London (Editor)
BAD FEELINGS

SELECTED PSYCHOANALYTIC ESSAYS

Roy Schafer
To Rita
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I am grateful to the following copyright holders for permission to reprint here, as Chapters 2, 5, 6, and 7 of this
book, material that first appeared in their journals: the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* for “Disappointment and Disappointedness”; the *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* for “Defenses against Goodness”; and the American Psychological Association for “The Psychotherapist’s Absence” and “Experiencing Termination: Authentic and False Depressive Positions,” both of which first appeared in *Psychoanalytic Psychology*. Although I have introduced minor changes of content and organization in the interest of enhanced clarity, consistency of style, continuity of content, and reduction of repetition, the arguments of these papers has not been changed in any significant way.
Troubled persons entering psychoanalysis depend on their analysts to maintain their analytic position through thick and thin. For unconsciously, and to some extent consciously, analysands are beset by painful feelings, one of which is hopelessness about being able to get rid of their emotional pain. Neither on their own nor with the help of significant others have they been able to change. Although analysands often seem to throw obstacles in the way of analysis, they do hope that their analysts will stand fast.

On their part, although they do have general guidelines that help them be consistent, analysts also try to learn in each case what constitutes leaving the analytic position, abandoning the analytic attitude, or, as it is said, breaking the frame. It may be offering reassurance, advice, or personal disclosures; it may be engaging in extensive questioning instead of listening to the drift of associations; it may be some or all of these and more. In the analysand's psychic reality, these deviations are likely to be experienced in one way or another as threatening. An attentive analyst can pick up the resulting signs of bad feeling even when, overtly, the analysands seem to fall in line and wel-
INTRODUCTION

come the breaking of the frame: signs of loss of confidence in the analyst's security, strength, or clarity of vision; mistrust; and feelings of rejection, abandonment, anger, and despair. The analysand may never have formulated that need for an analyst who remains reliably in place. However, the analyst must be careful never to underestimate the urgency of that need.

"Bad feeling" can refer to every kind of painful feeling. It need not have any of the moral—more exactly, moralistic—connotations that "bad" takes on in other contexts: for example, "bad manners" or "bad character." However, unconsciously or even consciously, "bad feelings" can imply moralistic condemnation. For example, "It is bad of you to feel that way!" or "You're being a nuisance to worry about that!" There are those who, having been scrupulously brought up in families that have elevated mental health to the status of the Eleventh Commandment, believe that they are being bad when they have or express negative feelings. When they begin to feel anxious, glum, or ashamed, they are stricken with guilt or fears of punishment. In these instances, the analyst is witness to severe superego pressure for perfect adjustment. We might say, then, that mental health has become the cleanliness that is next to godliness.

Moralized mental health is only one source of the bad feeling of guilt or anticipated punishment, and these are only two of the many bad feelings that analysts encounter in their daily work. In this book I will highlight a number of bad feelings that are particularly painful. Because anxiety, guilt, and shame are so pervasive, both in human experience and in the clinical material to be covered in these pages, I will not devote entire chapters to them. I will emphasize humiliation and mortification (the extremes of shame); disappointment and, with it, disappointedness as
a stance toward life; envy; abandonment; rejection; mournful loss; and the sense of dangerous vulnerability associated with experiencing one's own goodness or that of others and of making genuine progress toward maturity when that step has been anxiously or guiltily avoided for years. Despite its brevity, this list of bad feelings is long enough and the feelings it includes are sufficiently common and complex that, taken together, the chapters of this book have implications for the psychoanalysis of bad feelings in general.

One highlight of maturation is, of course, the development of defenses against painful—here "bad"—feelings. Consequently, the analyst's efforts consistently encounter not the bad feelings themselves but the defenses against them. Some of these defenses may be structured within pathological organizations designed to block feelings totally. In that case, the analysand may be understood as acting on the firm belief that sooner or later any feeling, even good feeling—happiness, confidence, enthusiasm, arousal, and so on—will bring on suffering. Chapter 1, "A Joyless Life," presents a clinical illustration of this extreme stand against feelings. Necessarily, then, this book has as much to do with defenses against feelings as with feelings themselves. Most likely the clinical analyst will be required to deal with compromise formations in which each constituent of the analysand's conflicts seems to have found limited expression, and that each of these constituents—including what appears to be simply defense—is loaded with pleasurable as well as painful feelings.

For the analysand to achieve genuine, stable, and adaptive emotional freedom, the analyst must maintain an empathic, respectful attitude toward the need for defense. Defense is not the enemy. It is essential analytic material as well as a necessary aspect of adaptive living. But be-
cause it may impede understanding of whatever it is that must be warded off, its strength or rigidity must be re­duced, if extreme, before the analytic process can achieve comprehensiveness and stable, beneficial results. Thus, it is a major part of the analyst's job to attempt to work through that need for defense as much as possible—"as much as possible" because analysis cannot change every­thing. Under these conditions, the analyst had best beware the temptation to feel omnipotent and then humiliated or otherwise guilty for not being helpful enough. Manifesta­tions of that countertransference inevitably add to the analysand's difficulties.

The reader will find what seems to be another set of com­promise formations in both my mode of conceptualizing and my clinical approach to analysands. My discussions reflect my multiple grounding in Freud's writings, mid­twentieth century psychoanalytic ego psychology, and contemporary Freudian analysis, all of them modified by my keen interest in, and appreciation of the clinical ap­proach of the contemporary Kleinians of London. I believe that, despite somewhat different terminology and tech­nique, the contemporary Freudian and Kleinian schools of thought are closely related, like branches of the same tree—Freud—that are growing in somewhat different di­rections. I do not believe that my drawing on these varied sources is a kind of opportunistic eclecticism. As I will try to demonstrate, I view myself as responding to a deep har­mony that has not yet been fully theorized.

This book is primarily clinical. I have tried to keep my remarks as down-to-earth as possible. My aim has been to help the reader find useful method and rich meaning in the analysis of bad feelings. To top things off, I have not neglected the analyst's bad feelings while at work. For ex­ample, in the final chapter, "Painful Progress," I develop a
critique of one common and usually unquestioned concept that I believe expresses bad feelings on the analyst's part. Specifically, I challenge Freud's use of "negative therapeutic reaction" to characterize analysands' tendencies to back away from their analytic gains. Feeling bad can influence not only the analyst's interventions but his or her conceptualizations as well. I believe that the conceptualization of "negative therapeutic reaction" expresses negative countertransference. "Negative" casts a dark shadow over the analysis of inevitable shifts in the transference, a shadow that indicates that the analyst's preference or expectation matters more at that moment than understanding the analytic phenomenon at hand. Before that concluding chapter, I, too, will have used that well-established concept in various places, for instance, in Chapter 4 on envy. I do believe, however, that it is best to view the reactions in question in another way. When in a neutral position, the analyst does best to consider these phenomena to be signs that analysands are trying to regulate the kinds and rates of change that they are undertaking. Sometimes analysands believe it necessary to back away from what they unconsciously experience as too risky for them at that moment. Too much of their psychic equilibrium is at stake. When they do back away, they show the analyst that something more remains to be analyzed or that more time is required before an insight can be consolidated or a change in mental organization can be implemented and stabilized. I ask, what is negative about that?
One of Freud's great contributions to psychoanalytic theory and technique was his constantly calling attention to the gain of pleasure concealed within the chronic psychical suffering that analysands present for treatment. It is now one of the chief aims of psychoanalytic work to interpret this gain in pleasure. To mention only a few examples of these unconscious pleasures: some analysands unconsciously maintain gratifying attachments to figures in their lives who, superficially, are presented as incontrovertibly "bad objects"; some, suffering from low self-esteem and complaining that they feel alone and helpless in a barren, persecutory world, get to be understood as satisfying their envious intentions to spoil actual or potential "good objects"; still others contrive to be punished as a way of assuaging their unconscious guilt feelings, in that way both enjoying relief from guilt and confirming their reassuring and pleasurable unconscious fantasies of omnipotent control.

It is well known that it is usually difficult to discern, bring to the analysand's conscious awareness, and work through these pleasure gains. Much of the difficulty stems
BAD FEELINGS

from the defenses that have been integrated into pathological organizations designed in part to protect these secret pleasures. Additionally, the defenses themselves can be interpreted as also providing unconscious sources of gratification. For example, as a defense against feelings of loss, identification with the lost object relieves painful grief while, in unconscious fantasy, it denies the loss by keeping that object with one—as oneself; also, defensive regression from oedipal-level entanglements to anal-sadistic modes of relationship simultaneously provides unconscious opportunities to gratify sadomasochistic inclinations and allows one to continue oedipal engagements in other terms, as when a son’s tormenting obstinacy can be interpreted as his carrying on a sexualized relationship with his mother.

Freud’s contribution is immeasurably helpful in analyzing those analysands (there are many of them) who present themselves for analysis with the complaint that they have been leading joyless lives. Though not hopeful about change for the better, they do express the wish to improve the quality of their lives. Often, they present a life history characterized by a painful and emotionally deprived childhood; inhibitions of initiative, creativity, and self-advancement; low self-esteem; and difficulty in forming and maintaining emotionally intimate and sexually gratifying relations with others. Apart from low mood and occasional irritability, these analysands usually show little affect.

In this chapter, I will present some fragments of the analysis of one such joyless man. The analysand, Ted, is mentioned in several places in this book, each time in another context and therefore each time differently thematized. For example, disappointment, humiliation, and defenses against goodness, each of which figured in Ted’s
A JOYLES S LIF E

analysis, are emphasized in one place but not another. Taken together, these interrelated examples can be re­
garded as illustrating the major technical concept of work­
ing through. And as in working through, some repetition of
life historical and descriptive material is unavoidable.

TED

Ted came to analysis complaining that his life was drab,
his mood low, and his capacity for social and sexual rela­
tionships markedly limited. No longer a young man, he
was unhappy about being unmarried and childless. His
self-presentation was notably devoid of affect. Ted's par­
ents, now deceased, had fled political persecution in a
Mediterranean country after members of their family had
been imprisoned or killed. Subsequently, they appear to
have lived frightened, secluded, depressed lives.

Over the course of Ted's analysis, it became possible to
interpret unconscious pleasures he gained through his os­
tensibly empty emotional life. For example, it was possible
to interpret to good effect a strong involvement in sados­
asochistic manipulation of others. He showed this in­
volvement especially clearly in his relationships with
women. Repeatedly, he disappointed them. He accom­
plished these disappointments by setting up battles with
them over commitment that he could be sure of winning.
More than winning, Ted was also proving to himself that he
needed nothing from them. His sense of security and un­
conscious omnipotence depended on his projecting his
own needfulness into these women and then viewing them
as grasping, predatory, and devouring. To insure his vic­
tory, he was quick to find fault with each woman, espe­
cially if he found her interesting or physically attractive.