

Interview with Cary Friedman, M.D.
Training and Supervising Analyst, BPSI
President-elect of BPSI and former chair, Education Policy Committee

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Note: The interview was conducted by e-mail from August-December 2024. It has been edited for length and clarity and approved by Cary Friedman.

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JMJ: When did you first come to BPSI? What was the context?

CF: I remember well climbing the stairs for the first time at 15 Commonwealth Avenue, BPSI's prior home—my heart pounded anxiously as I entered for my first night of classes as an analytic candidate in 1995. As a young gay psychiatrist prior to that day, I had always been drawn to psychoanalytic ideas, but had doubted whether I would be deemed capable and suitable to join the profession I revered.

When I began my own analysis and first considered applying to BPSI, openly gay clinicians were not permitted to train at most American institutes, and I was explicitly discouraged from doing so by Richard Isay, a prominent gay analyst who had come out after his training and was subsequently shunned by the profession. When my friend and colleague Paul Lynch was accepted as the first openly gay candidate at BPSI in 1993, and I had gained a bit more confidence, I subsequently applied and was accepted.

JMJ: Thanks for your frankness and openness!

CF: And thank you, John, for your interest.

JMJ: Applying must have taken some courage in those days. The American Psychiatric Association had removed homosexuality as a disorder in 1973, but APSA took much longer, I believe.

CF: In 1991 the American Psychoanalytic Association (APsAA) passed a statement saying that applicants for training could not be discriminated against based on their sexual orientation. However, the notion that homosexuality is pathological remained deeply embedded in psychoanalytic theory. The history of how homosexuality has been viewed by psychoanalysts

over time is complex, and I examined this when I gave the 2010 BPSI Spring Academic Lecture. An updated version of that lecture will be published in 2025 in *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*.¹

JMJ: What did your experience at BPSI turn out to be like in the nineties?

CF: I loved being a BPSI candidate. I had been hungry to learn analytic concepts and technique, and hungry for a community that shared my psychoanalytic perspective on clinical work. My class of seven really enjoyed each other and Thursday nights became a fun highlight of my week. It was also a time in which there was greater opportunity than in the past for new ideas—the centrality of oedipal theory as dogma was being challenged and the advent of relational theory felt, to some, like a breath of fresh air.

As BPSI's second openly gay candidate, I found everyone extremely welcoming and appreciative of my interest. I became part of a committee formed by Gerry Adler and Larry Hartmann² to address BPSI's history of discrimination and help us move forward, and we organized regular discussions and programs in collaboration with staff from the Fenway Health Center, a facility that largely serves Boston's LGBTQ+ community.

Most BPSI faculty I encountered seemed to feel glad that our stance on homosexuality was changing. However, homophobic ideas were everywhere in the psychoanalytic papers we read and my teachers rarely noticed this. They also didn't usually understand how generally accepted psychoanalytic constructs, particularly regarding oedipal development, were inherently homophobic as they were conceptualized at the time. My dilemma as a candidate became that if I spoke up in class and pointed this out, I risked being viewed as only interested in this point and not the rest of what the paper had to say, but if I didn't, I was letting bias go by unchallenged. So I usually did speak up, and found most faculty interested in hearing my perspective and learning from it. My dilemma resolved itself over time, as my straight classmates began noticing these biases and pointing them out in class themselves, for which I was greatly appreciative.

JMJ: That's quite a dilemma. Did you have a sense at that point of what struggles were taking place at other institutes, and how the BPSI experience compared?

CF: I was aware of the small number of gay people at other institutes—Sidney Phillips had trained as an openly gay man at Western New England in New Haven in the 1980's, a rare institute at which that wasn't an issue. Susan Vaughan began analytic training at Columbia the same year as Paul Lynch at BPSI, and a few others, like me, began over the next few years. Through APsaA meetings I met and joined a national community of gay and lesbian analysts,

¹ Cary Friedman, "A gay old time: Evolving psychoanalytic paradigms of (homo)sexuality." *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 45(10):908-922.

² Gerald Adler, M.D. (1930-2021) was a psychiatrist and training and supervising analyst at BPSI. Psychiatrist Lawrence Hartmann, M.D. served as president of the American Psychiatric Association and was important to the APA's removal of homosexuality from the DSM in 1973. The son of psychoanalyst and ego psychologist Heinz Hartmann, he was later made an Honorary Member of BPSI. Adler and Hartmann co-founded BPSI's Committee on Gender and Sexualities in 1996 [JM].

and Sid, Susan, and Ralph Roughton all came to speak at BPSI. While experiences varied, many described similar ones to mine at their home institutes.

JMJ: I imagine APsaA meetings—still at the Waldorf, I think—were not always a picnic when it came to gay, lesbian, and trans issues.

CF: Yes, the meetings were at the beautiful and historic, but dated, Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York. An APsaA Committee on Gay and Lesbian Issues (which was later renamed and is now the Committee on Gender and Sexuality) formed under the leadership of Ralph Roughton, and began running regular programs that aimed to understand homosexuality psychoanalytically without pathologizing it. Simultaneously, however, Charles Socarides, a leading proponent of treating homosexuality as an illness, continued to lead an APsaA discussion group through the nineties, which I attended once. Despite this exception, I generally found the meetings friendly, though I was always aware at BPSI and APsaA that there were probably many who were uncomfortable and quietly skeptical. There was definitely a sense, though, that the tide was turning towards acceptance of homosexuality.

As to transsexuality—I don't recall it even being discussed back then, and I wasn't aware of any openly trans analysts until many years later.

JMJ: You mentioned your own analysis. Would you be willing to say a word here about that experience, either on gay issues or otherwise?

CF: My first analyst was helpful in many ways but had a classical, heteronormative perspective that did not always resonate for me. My second analyst, however, had a more contemporary, relational approach that I found liberating. I felt deeply understood and supported by him, and I grew a great deal both professionally and personally through our work.

JMJ: Are there others who have been important to you at BPSI?

CF: Yes! It is an honor to be part of a professional community with so many colleagues I highly respect and appreciate collaborating with. In particular, my case supervisors, Jim Frosch, Steven Cooper, Ellen Blumenthal, and Tony Kris, each contributed greatly to my analytic development in important ways. After graduation, I continued supervision with Humphrey Morris, who remains a treasured consultant and mentor. I am indebted as well to Stephanie Brody, Richard Gomberg, and Catherine Kimble, for their endless support and wisdom.

JMJ: What approach do you most often take when doing analysis or therapy with your own patients. Is there a theory or technique that has influenced your work?

CF: I think of theory as just that—constructs (as opposed to “truths”) that we use to make meaning of our patients’ and our own unconscious experience. I don't believe in searching for “answers” or “cause”, because I don't believe we can ever know with certainty what determines the content of our internal experience. Furthermore, the search for causes itself can be pathologizing and shaming, as it was in psychoanalytical history regarding homosexuality. I am therefore less interested in asking “why,” rather than “how” questions, to

help my patients develop their own narratives of their pasts and find their own paths forward without judgment.

For me, to ask “how” in psychoanalysis means listening deeply, experiencing together, and sometimes interpreting. I draw on concepts from a wide range of theories. A few that I find particularly useful include unconscious conflict, resistance, object relatedness and constancy, need for self objects, the inevitability of empathic failures and importance of repair, the constant attention to how familiar dynamics play out and are felt in the transference/countertransference matrix, and the ubiquity of projective identification. I also appreciate that we can all fluctuate between paranoid/schizoid and depressive positions, as a reminder of the human psychic vulnerability in all of us.

Regarding technique—I draw on a parallel grab bag of principles. I believe in the paramount importance of creating a clear treatment frame and safe boundaries that provide room for a range of transference experiences. That said, treatment frames often get bent, and such enactments can become niduses for important analytic work. I have learned through experience to be more spontaneous and less of a rigid blank screen, and always try to be deeply thoughtful about the potential value, risks, and meanings of any self-disclosures I might make. I am attentive to my own reverie and use it to help make sense of the jointly created play space that develops in analytic dyads. Finally, I am particularly interested in the role of authenticity in our work, and think patients need to experience us as real, honest, fully present, and genuinely caring individuals in order to trust us with their psyches.

JMJ: Once you graduated from BPSI, I'm aware, you took on some educational/administrative roles in the institute. What committees or projects did you get involved in, and what drove your interest in them?

My first BPSI “job” after graduation was Secretary of the Board of Trustees, which happened to be when a bitter split developed within our organization. We had received an offer to buy our home at the time at 15 Commonwealth Avenue, and the disagreement that arose over whether to accept it exposed divisions on a variety of issues regarding BPSI and psychoanalysis. What began as a conflict about our literally “concrete” structure quickly ran much deeper. Our president at the time, Randy Paulsen, asked me to coordinate drafting a new mission statement for BPSI. Through a series of small group meetings attended by members with a range of perspectives, we worked to find common ground and shared visions of what we wanted BPSI to be, which was gradually crystallized into a new Mission Statement. But more important than the product of those final words was how this process helped members listen to each other and find common ground. I learned a lot about how to do that—and it became an interest and a goal in all of my subsequent leadership roles.

Since then, these roles have largely been in the Education Division’s Psychoanalytic Training Program, where I have been the Joint Curriculum/Faculty Executive Committee Vice Chair and Chair, Students Committee Vice Chair, and Education Policy Committee Chair. Projects I have had a significant role in include running Faculty Development Workshops, establishing a Case Development Program to help candidates begin analytic cases and move smoothly through training toward graduation, establishing the Committee on Inclusion and Diversity in Education

(currently the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee), renegotiating our relationship with the American Association of Psychoanalytic Education to allow us greater independence regarding policy decisions, and changing our “gender requirement” to a broader diversity requirement for candidates’ analytic cases.³

What has driven me has been fairly consistent. I am keenly aware of how psychoanalysis has profoundly helped me develop both professionally and personally, and I believe deeply in analysis and the importance of maintaining the high caliber of our training programs. I feel fortunate to have come to BPSI at a time when it had only recently been made accessible to me, and feel an obligation to work to continue to make it a more open, accessible, and supportive organization, especially for those of us who do not fit traditional models of who should be a psychoanalyst. But opening our doors more widely is only helpful if we also open our psychoanalytic minds more widely, and I have also been driven to help us to do so regarding our understanding of gender, sexuality, race, culture, and the effects of our social surround.

JMJ: There were, I imagine, both joys and frustrations connected with being the head of the Education Committee...

Yes indeed. While I have liked the work of keeping a large training program running, helping it progress, and making impactful change, I do not always find it easy to be in charge of and guide my many wise, deeply thoughtful, and often emphatically opinionated colleagues. But I have also appreciated how facing this challenge has pushed me to develop new capacities and master new skills.

JMJ: I started the interview by asking about your arrival at BPSI. How does the place look to you now?

Terrific! BPSI is a much more accessible and open-minded place than when I arrived, and I particularly appreciate how our anti-racism pledge has facilitated more freedom to challenge the status quo. But there is still much to do to keep this trajectory going, and I hope to continue to promote that process, particularly in my next leadership roles as BPSI President-Elect and President.

JMJ: Thank you so much for doing this interview!

CF: Thank you John. I have really appreciated the opportunity to reflect on and coalesce so many aspects of my psychoanalytic work.

³ The American Association of Psychoanalytic Education website says that the organization “works to ensure candidates experience a broad and sustained immersive psychoanalytic training experience by offering consultation, education, and on-site visits to our member institutes. In collaboration with our member institutes, AAPE establishes, promotes, and maintains psychoanalytic breadth and depth in training standards.” [JMJJ].