

**Book Review**

***From Both Sides of the Couch: Reflections of a Psychoanalyst, Daughter, Tennis Player, and Other Selves.* By Fern W. Cohen. North Charleston, NC: BookSurge, LLC, 2007, 204 pp., \$16.99**

**Reviewed by Chap Attwell, MD, MPH**

Fern Cohen treats the reader to a wonderful trip through her mind as she details – in an appropriately freely associative yet meaningfully organized way – her memoir. Through the lens of psychoanalysis, Cohen weaves multiple personal strands of her developmental and athletic lives and professional histories into a fabric worthy of study by any analyst who wishes to know more about the depth of impact excellent analytic work can yield. Cohen, writing from a senior point in her career and life, shares a breadth of perspective that accompanies a lifetime of analytic work. In her refreshing and rigorous emotional honesty, she warmly and respectfully invites the reader into her world, perhaps mirroring the healthy creation and maintenance of relationships shared with her family, patients, and friends. Cohen shares her journey, one that successfully metabolized the proverbial ghosts – real and intrapsychic – of her past into the ancestors of her family history (an idea of Loewald's), transforming past introjects into ones allowing for improved mental functioning, and displaying a passion for the field of psychoanalysis that would infect any potential analysand, resident or candidate in training, graduate student, or scholar of psychoanalysis. The profound impact of this memoir stems from the major reactions it elicits.

Cohen's memoir seems to blend the tradition of two important contributions to psychoanalytic writing. The first is Robert Morley's *The Analysand's Tale* (2007, Karnac Books). Morley notes the paucity of published accounts of analysands compared with those of analysts and assembles under one title numerous published analysands' tales. He does so with the express aim of seeking parallel themes useful for identifying the core of therapeutic work. Morley wishes to assess if the patient's recollection of what seemed the most influential in the work might be as valid as the analyst's, a question which Cohen – as analyst and patient – is uniquely suited to answer. In so doing, Cohen adds a rich voice to the literature that Morley gathers in part III of his book – accounts of patients in training to be psychoanalysts. The second is Lora Heims Tessman's *The Analyst's Analyst Within* (2003, Analytic Press). Tessman researched, through detailed interviews with analysts of different gender combinations and age ranges, the question of what makes, years later, the recollection of one's training analysis satisfying or dissatisfying, growth promoting or thwarting. Tessman concludes that the quality of affective engagement between analyst and analysand transcends the analyst's decade of training and/or theoretical orientation in yielding a productive analytic experience. Cohen's account supports Tessman's hypothesis, in that Cohen describes the level of affective engagement with each of her three analysts over different decades of her life. The moving experience and efficacy of her third analysis and the strong affective bond between herself as analysand and her analyst is testament to the power of the right fit

between analyst and patient (as well as to the delivery of good interpretations and the successful internalization of the analyst's analyst into the working procedural memory of the analysand as analyst).

A summary of Cohen's well-written account – unable to capture the depth of detail, sequence of associations, and engagement with the reader – does an injustice to the memoir and that which can be gained only by spending time with her movingly personal text. Core themes emerge, however, which serve as evocative signposts. In her first chapter, *mostly about my father*, Cohen introduces us to herself as a girl and to the beginning of her lifetime passion for tennis. In her lucid account, we learn of the intimate connections between her and her awe-inspiring yet distant and rigid jurist father, the late Judge Edward Weinfeld. As she describes the inseparability between her childhood trips to the tennis courts and her relationship with her father, we see the wiser, insightful adult looking back and making sense of the struggling adolescent. Cohen fights to understand her formidable tennis talent, along with her intense conflict over winning that comprises so much of her sense of self. She tells us about her profound anxiety in the face of aggression and the meaningful roots of its psychic danger, her fears of gaining too much weight, and her struggle to feel she could be safe and sexual in the intimate company of a man. She retraces her breakdown in college, re-affirming that it and its delivery of her to psychoanalysis is the best thing that ever happened to her. Cohen's plain language makes what once plagued her unconsciously as accessible as the significant relief she experienced from her own hard work and the insight gained in a good treatment.

As the story unfolds, in *mostly about psychoanalysis*, we learn of the middle phase of her life and meet the professional Cohen, already an accomplished psychologist and psychotherapist, as she decides to pursue psychoanalytic training and a third analysis. We hear her speak knowledgeably of psychoanalysis as a practitioner one moment and as a patient the next. The style works well to convey her evolution in each realm, particularly as she describes her first two analyses, one while away at college and the other as a young, single woman in New York City. Cohen's training allows her to reflect even more deeply on the technique and style of these two analyses, which add to the history of psychoanalysis. For instance, her first analyst, Dr. R, a man, required that she break up with a boyfriend in order for the analysis to continue; her second, Dr. L, a woman, failed to address Cohen's constant five or ten minute struggle to start talking in a session. Cohen convincingly interconnects her fear of authority, the exclusion of this critical transference symptom from meaningful inclusion in the work, and her second analyst's withholding, silent style. For all that Cohen accomplished in these two analyses (she married a loving, available man, had children, profoundly enjoyed the vicissitudes of motherhood, and established herself professionally), she poignantly convinces us of the merits (and pain) of the regression to a childlike state and its careful analysis in reconstructing the pivotal pre-Oedipal roots of her conflicts with aggression and fluctuating sense of self accomplished in her third analysis. She shows us, and the writing of this book is further evidence, of its utility in the creation of scrupulous honesty and the ability to bear its affects. For example, Cohen states:

In the contemporary light of hindsight, and the works of Klein, Winnicott, and others who have become so integral to understanding the psychic world, what I now know is that Dr. L's insistence on my wish for a baby (which wasn't unconscious at all although some of my conflicts about having one were) shut out the significant domains of deprivation, envy, and their consequences. Left as I was for more than two decades with pockets of unconscious turmoil in those areas, for all that I had learned, I could not decipher the clues that kept getting in my way on the tennis court, especially since I considered myself to have been well-enough analyzed to have acquired the requisite tools to help me figure things out. Sometimes I could and I did, but for the most part I lived an uneasy truce with them, little realizing that significant pieces of the puzzle had been left unexamined and untouched (pp. 97-98).

This last sentence perhaps serves as the fulcrum of the chapter, and Cohen goes on to portray vivid examples of work with her patients, vignettes from the tennis court, and exchanges with her third analyst, Dr. Stephenson, which capture her working sense of a traditional but flexible approach to psychoanalytic theory and technique.

The third and last chapter, *mostly about omissions and consolidations*, reads like a moving analytic session from a patient nearing the end of treatment, one who brings into the room past and present, transference then and now, the healing force of treatment, a sense of what can never be, and a peaceful resolution of all of the above, blended with an appreciation for the depth of commitment sustained by both members of the dyad. Cohen brings together much of what has been left unanswered – what more about the emotional relationship with her mother? – into relief; she also goes deeper. We gain a telescopic look into the families of her mother and father and learn what forces and circumstances prompted them to deal with their own tragedies as they did. And in one of the more electrically descriptive sequences of analytic prose this reader has yet to encounter, Cohen connects early strain trauma from her own early life; notions of Phyllis Greenacre's "excluded-in vs. included-out;" denial; fear of competition and the consequences of success; the connection between psyche and soma; ambivalent feelings in intimate relationships; sexual curiosity; money; courtship and marriage; penis envy; narcissistic vulnerability stemming from a lack of self-soothing and poor internalization of maternal functions; and ramifications of each through the Rosetta Stone behavior of her life on the tennis court. In portraying the depth of her lifelong mental struggles, as well as the relief she derived from her analytic experiences, Cohen illustrates the very method of therapeutic action in language available to any lay person. In rooting out the bereft, longing, homesick, and empty feelings so pervasive to what might seem an ideal childhood from a distance, she replaces, via the internalization of so many functions of her analyst, the relentless invitations to join in with forces from the past with optimistic, balanced, flexible approaches to what life deals her. Rather than needing to prove herself as a cover for feelings of insecurity, as her former self would seemingly have done, Cohen writes this memoir with a sincere, genuine tone – one of vulnerable, trusting

honesty so respected in work as penetrating as Cohen's last analysis – and simply shows us the real thing that she has been all along.

Cohen's work belongs in our curricula at institutes and with the greater public. Whether in courses of analytic writing, therapeutic action, analytic narrative, outcome studies, importance of fit in the dyad, the value of reconstruction, the force of transference, the psychic internalization of one's analyst, or the impact of analytic work over a lifetime (including the need for re-analysis), *From Both Sides of the Couch* will prove a useful, articulate addition. For any potential analyst, Cohen's book will open a door to understanding the impact a treatment of this magnitude might have. Whether a patient of Dr. Cohen's from the lay public crosses paths with her book, and what impact her book may or may not have on the treatment of any given patient (given the complexity of any individual's life history), remains to be seen. What seems clear is that Cohen has taken the courageous leap of bearing her soul, and the profound impact psychoanalysis has had in its mending, for any potential reader's benefit. I highly recommend this work.

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