

Film about Jung and Freud's Relationship and about "the Talking Cure"

The recent David Cronenberg film, "A Dangerous Method" (2011) is a film that looks at the early historical context of the "talking cure" of psychoanalysis at the turn of the twentieth century and at the relationship between Sigmund Freud (played by Viggo Mortensen) and Carl G Jung (Michael Fassbender). Freud saw in Jung the potential for his younger colleague to carry on promoting the continued research and study of the "talking cure." Jung appeared to have the energy, devotion and enthusiasm for continued study and scientific rigor. Jung, as a young psychiatrist, was just beginning his clinical work and research in the world-renowned hospital of Burgholzli in Zurich, Switzerland (Gray, 1988). The director of the hospital was Eugen Bleuler, another well-known name in the history of psychiatry (early researcher of mental illness and one who coined the words schizophrenia, ambivalence and autism). Jung was reading Freud's writings and was particularly interested in dreams. But, he also was beginning to use the "talking cure" with patients at the hospital. Freud and Jung communicated through letters and the film notes that on the occasion of their first meeting at Freud's home in Vienna, Austria, they had a 13-hour conversation. Peter Gray in his book, Freud (1988) documents that this apparently did occur when Jung came to meet Freud in Austria.

From the perspective of training and supervision, it makes sense to consider the collegial, initially mentoring relationship between these two historically significant figures in the field of counseling and psychotherapy. The film portrays them in a manner that seems fairly true to Gray's historical description and other descriptions noted in many academic texts. In addition, the film develops them more fully as men of their time and vocation. I would like to note that the beginning of "the talking cure" was not a straightforward process, and it necessitated working through many complex issues. Freud and Jung debated many aspects of what they were doing with analysis. Boundaries around who does analysis with whom is most notably different than our current ethical guidelines (dual or multiple relationships). In the hundred years since that time period, much has transpired in the development of ethical codes of the mental health professions. The ACA Code of Ethics certainly provides clearer guides in this regard now.

Jung and Freud engage in an intense collegial relationship over the approximately six years depicted in the film. Jung begins to depart from Freud in the definition of libido and the premise that sexuality and sexual development was ultimately at the genesis of neuroses. The schism between the two men was most likely over some of the direction they wanted to go with analysis. For some time, Jung had been intrigued by mysticism, the idea of a collective unconscious, and the role of dreams. "A Dangerous Method" also suggests that the sexual relationship that Jung has with a patient, Sabina Spielrein (Keira Knightley), contributes to the demise of their relationship. This a particularly egregious breach of what one would expect in the analytic relationship as defined today but was also acknowledged at that time as a breach. Ann Hornaday in the Washington Post (December, 2011) suggests that

their temperaments, priorities, and class differences strongly contributed to the schism between Jung and Freud. The film allows for us to see these aspects of who they were and how they lived and worked.

As supervisors or mentors today we are called to respond to breaches such as that of Jung with Spielrein. We are also keenly aware of how it would be unethical to do an analysis on a family member. For example, early in the film, after Spielrein is improving and noted to be bright, talented and interested in medicine, she also assists Jung with a free association study and Jung's pregnant wife is the subject. At the conclusion of the free association task, he asks his assistant Spielrein for an interpretation, part of which involves a comment on their marriage. And, the interpretation is not especially favorable or positive about the marriage.

As the field evolved, mental health professionals came to understand that these dual relationships could affect treatment, and are guided by the "do no harm" principle. As supervisors today, we must guide our supervisees in developing an understanding of appropriate boundaries, including the modeling of our own healthy boundaries. Our understanding of the "talking cure" and the forms it takes today are evolved enormously. It is quite intriguing to see this portrayal by Hollywood of the early twentieth century thinking and portrayal of these two prominent historical figures in our field. It makes me wonder how much more evolved we might be in another hundred years or even twenty-five years, given the rapid changes in mental health, medicine, science and technology. Beyond its value as entertainment, "A Dangerous Method" can be used as a training tool to facilitate dialogue about the maturation of "the talking cure." Taking a retrospective look at its very beginnings stimulates us to consider how we will guide ourselves and our supervisees in the future as we use the "talking cure" and how will we approach the ethical dilemmas that unfold.

Beale, L. (2011). "Hollywood's blocked feelings about therapy." *Washington Post*, December, 2011.

Gray, P. (1988). *Freud: A Life for Our Time*. New York: W . W. Norton & Co.

Hornaday, A. (2011). "A Dangerous Method: Freudian slips and Jung lust." *Washington Post*, December 16, 2011.

