

# Psychotherapy on the Road to ... Where?

... Because it was clear at this landmark meeting that, although the participants agreed it was a time for bold action, psychotherapists were deeply divided over whether that action should be guided by the cool logic of science or a spirit of humanistic activism. The answer will determine not only what psychotherapy means, many experts said, but its place in the 21st century...

excerpts from an article

by **Benedict Carey** in **New York Times** 27 Dec 2005 *Science* section

<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/27/science/27ther.html> (

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Anaheim, Calif. - ... mid-December ... a conference on the state of psychotherapy, its current challenges and its future...

The meeting brought together some 9,000 psychologists, social workers and students, along with many of the world's most celebrated living therapists, among them the psychoanalyst Dr. Otto Kernberg, the Hungarian-born psychiatrist and skeptic Dr. Thomas Szasz, and Dr. Albert Bandura, the pioneer in self-directed behavior change...

Calls to arms rang through several conference halls. In the opening convocation, Dr. Hunter "Patch" Adams - the charismatic therapist played on screen by Robin Williams - displayed on a giant projection screen photos from around the world of burned children, starving children, diseased children, some lying in their own filth.

He called for a "last stand of loving care" to prevail over the misery in the world, its wars and "our fascistic government." Overcome by his own message, Dr. Adams eventually fell to the floor of the stage in tears.

Many in the audience of thousands were deeply moved; many others were bewildered. Some left the arena...

For example, cognitive therapy, in which people learn practical thought-management techniques to dispel self-defeating assumptions and soothe anxieties, has proved itself in many studies...

Using vague, unstandardized methods to assist troubled clients "should be prosecutable" in some cases, said Dr. Marsha Linehan of the University of Washington, who has developed a well-studied method of treating suicidal patients...

Dr. Donald Meichenbaum, research director of the Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment in Miami, showed a film of the first session he conducted with a woman who was suicidal months after witnessing her boyfriend die in a traffic accident. After gently prompting her to talk about the accident, Dr. Meichenbaum then zeroed in on something he had noticed when the woman entered his office: she was clutching a cassette tape.

He asked about the tape and learned that it was a recording of her late boyfriend's voice, expressing love for her. "I play it over and over, and it makes me so depressed," said the woman, in a tiny voice.

And here Dr. Meichenbaum stopped the film and addressed the audience.

"The tape!" he said. "When during the session do you go for the cassette tape? What do you do with the tape?" ...

"Now, is any research study ever going to tell you exactly the right thing to do when your client comes in with a tape of her dead lover's voice?" Dr. Meichenbaum asked.

And there was the rub. As psychotherapy struggles to define itself for an age of podcasts and terror alerts, it will need ideas, thinkers, leaders. Yet the luminaries here, many of whom rose to prominence three decades ago, were making their way off the stage. And it was not clear who, or what, would take their place.

Across the street at Disneyland, where just about any metaphor is available for the taking, Dr. Siegel was working out the meaning of the park for himself. A native of Los Angeles, he has many memories of visiting as a child, perhaps nowhere more so than the circular drive in front of Sleeping Beauty's Castle.

"The circle of choice," he said, looking around. "This is where you decide, where you think about your mood and which way you want to go - to Frontierland, Tomorrowland." ...

The question is, How to get to Tomorrowland? ([full article \(http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/27/science/27ther.html\)](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/12/27/science/27ther.html))