

CLINICAL VIGNETTE

“GREAT TAN, BITCH!”

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CLINICAL VIGNETTE – GREAT TAN, BITCH!

THE PATIENT JANET IS A 31 – YEAR – OLD MARRIED WOMAN WHO HAS A HISTORY OF DIFFICULT RELATIONSHIPS WITH ALMOST EVERYONE IN HER LIFE

SHE IS PARTICULARLY TROUBLED BY HER LACK OF CLOSE WOMEN FRIENDS

JANET HAS BEEN WORKING HARD IN THE TREATMENT, HAS MADE SUBSTANTIAL GAINS IN HER PROFESSIONAL LIFE, AND HAS VERY MUCH IMPROVED THE QUALITY OF HER RELATIONSHIP WITH HER HUSBAND

JANET AND HER THERAPIST (A WOMAN) HAVE HAD A GOOD, RELATIVELY UNCONFLICTED RELATIONSHIP

JANET CLEARLY LIKES, AND IS RESPECTFUL OF, THE THERAPIST

UPON THE THERAPIST’S RETURN FROM A WEEK – LONG VACATION IN FLORIDA, JANET, AT THE END OF THE SESSION AND JUST AS SHE IS LEAVING, TURNS BACK TO HER THERAPIST AND, AS HER PARTING SHOT, BLURTS OUT, “GREAT TAN, BITCH!”

THE THERAPIST, TAKEN ABACK AND AT A LOSS FOR WORDS, SAYS NOTHING, SMILES WANLY, AND NODS GOODBYE

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AFTER DISCUSSING THE SITUATION WITH A COLLEAGUE, THE THERAPIST OPENS THE NEXT SESSION WITH THE FOLLOWING

“WE HAVE TALKED A LOT ABOUT HOW UPSETTING IT IS FOR YOU TO HAVE SO FEW WOMEN FRIENDS.

“I THINK THAT NOW, IN LIGHT OF WHAT HAPPENED AT THE END OF OUR LAST SESSION, I AM COMING TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING THAT I HAD NEVER BEFORE COMPLETELY UNDERSTOOD.

“WHEN YOU LEFT LAST TIME, YOUR PARTING WORDS WERE ‘GREAT TAN, BITCH!’

“I WONDER IF, BY SAYING THAT, YOU WERE TRYING TO SHOW ME WHAT SOMETIMES HAPPENS FOR YOU WHEN YOU FEEL CLOSE TO A WOMAN AND THEN FIND YOURSELF BECOMING COMPETITIVE.”

HERE THE THERAPIST IS USING HER “EXPERIENCE OF SELF” – HER COUNTERTRANSFERENTIAL REACTION – TO INFORM AN INTERVENTION THAT IS REASONABLY AUTHENTIC – ALTHOUGH NOT PARTICULARLY EMPATHIC

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THE THERAPIST'S INTENT IS NOT TO RESONATE EMPATHICALLY
WITH THE PATIENT'S AFFECTIVE EXPERIENCE IN THE MOMENT

RATHER, HER INTENT IS TO ENHANCE
THE PATIENT'S UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT
SHE MUST CERTAINLY SOMETIMES ENACT
IN HER RELATIONSHIPS WITH WOMEN
WHEN SHE BEGINS TO FEEL CLOSE
– AND THEREFORE COMPETITIVE –
WITH THEM

THE THERAPIST'S AWARENESS OF HER OWN
"COUNTERTRANSFERENTIAL REACTION"
TO THE PATIENT'S "PROVOCATIVE ENACTMENT"
– OF FEELING TAKEN ABACK AND PUT OFF
BY THE PATIENT'S DOOR HANDLE REMARK –
ENABLES THE THERAPIST TO OFFER
THE PATIENT AN "ACCOUNTABILITY STATEMENT"
THAT CHALLENGES THE PATIENT TO TAKE
OWNERSHIP OF HER HOSTILE COMPETITIVENESS

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