

Still Revolutionary After All These Years: A Celebration of the Work of Professor Sidney J. Blatt

SITAR

June 7, 2014

It wasn't supposed to be this way...



1928 - 2014

Overview

- Sid Blatt, the person, as I knew him
- Connecting Sid to SITAR – relationships, theories, data
- Core theoretical ideas
- Why his work remains profoundly relevant to SITAR
- Where to learn more
- Today's talks

Sid Blatt

- Extraordinary enthusiasm, energy and vitality
- Extraordinary, wide-ranging intellect, endlessly connecting ideas and generating new ones
- Remarkable ability to go back and forth among clinical discourse, theoretical discourse, and data
- Exceptional capacity for relatedness and generativity

This captures Sid's magic much better than a solo portrait photo



Connecting Sid to SITAR – Four Generations of Relationships



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Connecting with Sid at SITAR



Connecting Sid to SITAR – Theoretical Links

- Sid created a “big theory,” drawing on Freud, object relations theorists, Rogers, and Piaget
- His core concept of self-definition and relatedness as “two polarities of experience” has a strong family resemblance to the 2-dimensional theories of Leary, Benjamin, Wiggins, et al.

Connecting Sid to SITAR – Empirical Links

- Dependency and self-criticism were originally postulated to be personality vulnerabilities for depression.
- They are now understood to have implications far beyond depression.
- They can be thought of as maladaptive forms of agency and communion, and so are pertinent to virtually all SITAR research.

Core Theoretical Ideas - I

- Achieving mature relatedness and positive self-definition are fundamental developmental tasks that dialectically interact across the entire life-span.
- Psychopathologies arise from adverse interpersonal experiences that give rise to distortions or exaggerations in one of the two developmental lines.

Core Theoretical Ideas - II

- Mental representations of self and others are developmental products that differ in both content and structure across individuals and that underlie key personality differences.
- Successful psychotherapy depends on a constructive interpersonal relationship that revives the dialectic between relatedness and self-definition and transforms mental representations.

Why is Sid's work so important, especially for SITAR?

- 40 years on, it remains revolutionary and subversive:
 - His theory provides a comprehensive, integrated, operationalized alternative to the medical model zeitgeist of categorical diagnosis and RCTs of manualized treatments.
- It remains profoundly heuristic/generative – research is accelerating.

Two Revolutionary Themes in Blatt's Work

I. Psychopathology as dimensional rather than categorical

- Psychopathology reflects distortions or exaggerations of the normal processes of personality development.
- Various “disorders” are not discrete entities but rather differ in developmental level and their focus on one or the other of the two major developmental pathways, relatedness and self-definition.
- Consequently, the theory permits us to understand the problems in living of people carrying a wide range of diagnostic labels -as well as those of people without diagnostic labels - in a common theoretical framework.

Two Revolutionary Themes in Blatt's Work

II. Psychotherapy as relational rather than technical

- Psychotherapy is based on restarting the dialectic between relatedness and self-definition that characterizes normal development.
- The process requires a high quality therapeutic relationship.
- New relational experiences lead to transformations of mental representations of self and others.

Now That's Heuristic:

Correlates of Dependency and Self-Criticism:

- Depression, SAD, BPD, suicide, substance abuse
- Anger, aggression, PTSD, gambling, chronic pain
- Autonomous and controlled motivation
- Insecure attachment, low trust, relationship dissatisfaction
- Submissive behavior, low agreeable behavior, flux and spin
- Compassion, self-compassion, fear of compassion
- Stress generation, coping, and social support
- Parenting practices
- Adjustment to mid-life and old age

You Need This Theory!

Experiences of Depression

THEORETICAL, CLINICAL, AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES



Sidney J. Blatt

Polarities of Experience

RELATEDNESS AND
SELF-DEFINITION IN
PERSONALITY
DEVELOPMENT,
PSYCHOPATHOLOGY,
AND THE
THERAPEUTIC PROCESS



Sidney J. Blatt

FOREWORD BY PETER FONAGY

Today's Talks

Just a sampler of Sid-inspired work!

- Development of dependency and self-criticism and pathways to anxiety and depression.
- Therapy – patient personality and the therapeutic relationship as predictors of outcome.
- Therapy – patient personality in relation to process in CBT.