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Finishing Therapy Well (Book Review)

Kristina M. Kays

George Fox University, kkays@georgefox.edu

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Review of: *Good Goodbyes: Knowing How to End in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis*

By: Jack Novick and Kerry Kelly Novick, Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2006. 160 pp. ISBN 0-7657-0412-9. \$34.95

Deciding when to end clinical therapy and how to end it well can be a mystifying process. In *Good Goodbyes: Knowing How to End in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis*, Jack Novick and Kerry Kelly Novick share insights from their vast combined experience to diminish the mystery of therapeutic closure. The book, which is firmly based in psychoanalytic theory, uses a question format to explore the many hows, whys, whats, and whens of termination. The authors outline treatment stages along the path to the therapeutic conclusion, all the while fine-tuning a constructive approach for supplying the good in goodbye.

As a beginning therapist I endured terminations with mixed emotions. Often I was relieved to be done with a client when I felt stuck and therefore exposed. At other times I experienced discouragement at not being able to reach an adequate conclusion. Far less frequently, I found satisfaction in a process done well and in watching a client move forward, equipped to manage life more effectively. Only recently, as a more seasoned therapist, have I learned to appreciate the critical nature of endings and the influence on both treatment and the clinician. Despite recent works such as *How Much Is Enough: Endings in Psychotherapy and Counselling*, by Leslie Mordin (2000), and *Endings and Beginnings: On Terminating Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis*, by Herbert Schlesinger (2005), until now there has been a lack of adequate resources addressing the needs of therapists dealing with termination.

As psychoanalysts, teachers, and supervisors, the Novicks bring a refreshing perspective to “endings, beginnings, and the work needed for a good goodbye” (p. xi), filling in gaps not previously addressed. Working from a list of questions supplied by clients, supervisees, and students, the Novicks walk through the phases of analytic therapy, beginning with an explanation of the application of Freudian thought to current psychotherapy. From there, they explore the influence of termination on the psychoanalytic treatment phases from evaluation through the beginning, middle, pretermination, termination, and posttermination phases. In other chapters the authors summarize stages of analysis using a question–answer format, creating a virtual forum. This layout is especially helpful for locating information to apply in practice settings.

For therapists trained in other schools of thought, however, the exclusively psychoanalytic model of termination is of somewhat limited value. For example, the authors briefly discuss the role of pleasure in the termination phase, explaining how sadomasochistic behaviors maintain a closed system of self-regulation, whereas the open system of self-regulation is empowered through the pleasure experienced in healthy interactions with self and environment (p. 108). In cognitive, behavioral, and family systems theories, however, the meaning of *sadomasochism* and *pleasure* would be interpreted in more concrete terms. As a result, this discussion of pleasure lacks clear application for practitioners in other schools of thought. Fortunately, each chapter includes illustrations that allow practitioners with little training in psychoanalysis to understand key concepts without a deep grounding in psychoanalytic theory.

Some of the new insights into termination do generalize across theoretical orientations. Among the most prominent is the Novicks' model of termination, which incorporates “evolving ideas about the development of two systems of self-regulation” (p. 6). In this model, the clinician evaluates the client's behaviors at each phase in light of their influences on termination. This anticipatory approach links each phase of treatment with a goal in an open system therapeutic conclusion. Additionally, *Good Goodbyes* illustrates the consequences of failing to differentiate between the therapist's and client's termination needs. The authors go beyond transference and countertransference and delve into issues surrounding attachment to the client and grief at the end of treatment. Finally, the authors discuss how an abrupt end to treatment confuses the client, undermining the beneficial work already completed. Good termination includes the same elements found in the rest of good therapy: clearly stated boundaries, room for emotional responses such as grief, and a plan for how to handle what comes next. The authors demonstrate how these factors influence long-term well-being.

I regret that few of my clients report good terminations with previous therapists. Nevertheless, good goodbyes are possible when clear therapy goals are kept in focus, and structuring treatment with an end in mind allows necessary reflection and closure for both client and clinician. Although it is comprehensively psychoanalytic, *Good Goodbyes* presents a solid contribution to understanding the process of properly ending psychotherapy. Applying the lessons set forth in this text will enhance the long-term positive changes that are possible through effective psychotherapy.

References

Murdin, L. (2000). *How much is enough: Endings in psychotherapy and counselling*. London: Routledge.

Schlesinger, H. (2005). *Endings and beginnings: On terminating psychotherapy and psychoanalysis*. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.