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# Father Hunger: Explorations With Adults and Children (Book Review)

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## **Short-Term Play Therapy for Children**

*Heidi Gerard Kaduson & Charles E. Schaefer, (Eds.)*

*New York: Guilford, 2001*

Reviewed by Joan Granucci Lesser

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## **Father Hunger: Explorations With Adults and Children**

*James M. Herzog*

*Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 2001*

Reviewed by Jerrold R. Brandell

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In his introductory chapter, James Herzog advises the reader that his book, while not conceived as a textbook either of psychoanalytic theory or technique, is actually intended to highlight the processes of development, particularly insofar as these may become derailed, and their resolution and repair within the analytic setting. More discretely, Herzog is interested in the developmental realm of fathers and children; in the evolution of *self with father*; the negotiation of developmental hurdles, conflicts, crises, and trau-

mata arising in the relationship between children and their fathers; and the sequelae of these early relations. Never straying very far from the cases themselves, he nevertheless, manages to incorporate data from qualitative research studies and to propose theoretical ideas in what may be described as a tapestry of developmental principles, psychoanalytic narratives, and qualitative investigations that creates a unique imprimatur.

In a literary style that is, at times, reminiscent of the object relationalist D. W. Winnicott (although Winnicott's greatest contributions involved *mothers* and mothering), Herzog acquaints us with a framework for assaying and comprehending the architecture and psychological meaning of fathering and of being fathered. "Father hunger," he tells us, is a universal longing for the absent masculine parent whose presence could help to contain, integrate, and rechannel the child's unmodulated, aggressive drives and fantasies. Describing father hunger as "an affective state of considerable tenacity and force," Herzog offers a series of clinical vignettes derived from a much larger study of children of divorce. Younger children experience the father's absence as a deprivation, but not only because he is unavailable to perform the critical role of extricating the not-yet-fully individuated child from the maternal symbiotic orbit, a theme originally attributable to psychoanalytic developmentalist Margaret Mahler. The father, Herzog avers, actively *intrudes* on the maternal-child symbiosis: "He breaks up the intimate, homeostatically attuned resonating empathy," sibling-like, through gross motor play. Moreover, through this playfully aggressive engagement, forces that might otherwise lead to a surfeit of unworked-through aggression, appear not to gain ascendancy. These aggressions, when not absorbed or integrated, may figure prominently in depressive reactions, and can lead to what Herzog describes as the *Erlkonig* syndrome, a disturbance resulting from the father's failure to intervene to protect the child from such menacing forces.

The theme of play, in respect to its various developmental and clinical meanings, real and metaphorical, and as a mode of therapeutic engagement in the child, adolescent, and adult cases Herzog presents, attains the quality of a leitmotif in this work. One of the many ways Herzog explores the significance of play in the analytic situation is via his concept of the "shift to the left." In the ordinary course of development, play progresses from enactment to symbolization, yet this does not appear to be the case when traumatic experiences have supervened. In such an instance, play may undergo a *deformation*, culminating in a series of regressive transformations from *play as displacement* to *play as enactment* to *play as obligatory mutual enactment*. This idea is elaborated through several detailed clinical vignettes.

Herzog's differentiation of posttraumatic stress from *traumatic character* is also noteworthy, perhaps because it involves the rehabilitation of the concept of trauma apart from its incarnation as a diagnosable *DSM-IV* disorder. In

the traumatic character, the trauma is in effect, sealed off, and comes to be associated with enactments, constriction of affectivity, and so forth. Elsewhere, Herzog seems to fall back on the idea of "cumulative" or strain trauma when discussing what amounts to the accretion of pathogenic experiences. The term *cumulative trauma*, however, has been criticized both for its circularity in reasoning, and because it may actually obscure the real meaning of the concept of trauma (Krystal, 1988).

Although he doesn't appear to use this language, Herzog's depictions of the clinical process reveal an *intersubjective* dimension that makes the clinical vignettes highly readable, but also gives us essential raw data often missing from psychoanalytic narratives. The result is that we may participate not only in Herzog's detailed explorations of his patient's "inscapes," but also in his own internal processes. In such a reconstruction of the clinical process, considerations of analytic technique are no less important than are the erotically and aggressively tinged fantasies and feelings his patients evoke. Accordingly, transference and countertransference matters, particularly, though hardly exclusively, as they are revealed in the cases of Natalia and Jonah, become prominent foci. It is of some interest that Herzog characterizes as a transference repetition the pressure exerted by certain patients who attempt to engage him "as a partner in a developmental dialogue designed to build a self-regulating inner structure (see, e.g., p.156). As described, this phenomenon sounds very much like the primitive merger-like transference originally identified by Kohut (Tolpin & Kohut, 1980). In such a transference, the child attempts to use the analyst as a self-object, a psychological extension of the self in which the analyst is not perceived as having a separate center of initiative, to compensate for missing internal functions and capacities.

*Father Hunger* has certain limitations. Many though not all of the cases presented evince a cultural and socioeconomic homogeneity. Patients are often professionals—doctors, attorneys, university professors, graduate students, and so on—or the children of such professionals; almost all appear to be Caucasian and a significant number are Jewish. Many appear to be middle class or upper middle class, though there are also notable exceptions (e.g., "The T Family" [Chapter 11] and "Boys Who Make Babies" [Chapter 18]). Certain important themes are not referenced. For example, nontraditional family structures involving parents who have become avowedly gay or lesbian, and the unique dynamic issues that may be posed to the offspring of such parents, are neither represented in the clinical data nor addressed in the theoretical material.

Nevertheless, this is a creative, thoughtful, and engaging work, offering the reader perspectives on development and psychoanalytic treatment enriched by attention to the *interiority* of the clinical process. It will likely be of greater interest to clinicians and developmentalists, whose interests lie in

the direction of dynamic meaning, narratology, and subjective knowing, though others might certainly benefit from its perusal. It is at times, provocative, almost invariably *evocative*. Herzog's careful, analytic exploration of his own aggressive or erotized reveries and fantasies not only makes *Father Hunger* intriguing, palpable, and real; it also heightens readers' awareness of their own associations. The aforementioned limitations notwithstanding, this original and well-written work is strongly recommended.

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### References

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For more information on this book, visit  
<http://www.analyticpress.com/books/259-7.html>

## **The Widening Gap: Why America's Working Families Are in Jeopardy and What Can Be Done About It**

Jody Heymann  
*New York: Basic Books, 2001*

Reviewed by Eva Havas

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