

8 From Unresolved to earned Secure attachment

The AAP as a powerful clinical tool in psychotherapy

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I have previously written about the therapeutic benefits of giving clients feedback about the results of the Adult Attachment Projective Picture System (AAP; George & West, 2012) in the middle of long-term psychotherapy (Finn, 2011). This chapter will explain and illustrate how the AAP picture stimuli are powerful therapeutic tools in and of themselves, and how they provide opportunities for clinicians to help clients reintegrate and reconsolidate implicit emotions and memories tied to their problems in living. I begin by introducing the woman whose story I detail in this chapter; my initial engagement involved a couples' assessment.

Couples' therapeutic assessment and initial AAP administration

I first met “Carole,” when she and her husband of 38 years, “Bill,” came to Austin for a couples' Therapeutic Assessment (TA). (See Finn, 2015, for a detailed description of couples TA.) At the time, Carole was 65 years old, and Bill was 70. I learned that Bill had precipitously “left” Carole three months earlier while she was away on a trip by emailing that he was deeply unhappy with the marriage and wanted to end it. He had accused Carole of no longer caring about him, treating him like an “appliance,” and asked her to stay away until he could move out the house. Carole had been caught off guard completely and was devastated. She had stayed with her adult son for a week before returning home and was unable to function for several weeks. She sought outpatient psychiatric care and gradually got back on her feet but was still confused about why Bill had left and whether there was any hope of reconciliation. Bill had heard about couples' TA from his individual psychotherapist and broached the idea with Carole, telling her that he was willing to postpone a divorce and work on their relationship for one year. After some negotiations by phone and email (during which I asked both of them to sign an agreement that the TA results would not be used in any future legal proceedings), the couple arrived in Austin for several weeks of intensive psychological testing combined with individual and couples' psychotherapy.

Although I will focus on Carole for most of this chapter, first let me summarize the couples TA. At the beginning of the process, I asked Bill and Carole to pose questions they wanted to have addressed through the assessment. Carole was mainly focused on understanding the relationship rupture, asking, *What is it that I failed to provide Bill that led to his needing to leave?* and *Is there something I did that made Bill think I wouldn't be devastated by his leaving?* Bill seemed more focused on building an apologia for himself, asking, *Why did I leave the way that I did?* and *Was there something in the relationship that led to my leaving without a face-to-face discussion?* All these questions seemed very apt to me, as both Bill and Carole described being very much in love at the beginning of their relationship, successfully raising children together, and supporting each other in highly successful careers. Bill complained that in recent years, Carole had become increasingly involved in her work and friends and emotionally distant from him, for example, not giving him a card or gift on Valentine's Day. Carole said she was still in love with Bill, had been unaware of his being unhappy in the marriage, but that he too had become more emotionally committed to other relationships over the previous three to four years. Bill's withdrawal bothered Carole to some extent, and she told of speaking to him about her feelings but dropping the topic when he got defensive. Still, Carole had never considered that the marriage was in danger.

During the TA, both individuals took a series of psychological tests, including the MMPI-2-RF (Ben-Porath & Tellegen, 2008), Rorschach (R-PAS, Meyer et al., 2011), Early Memory Procedure (Bruhn, 1992a, 1992b), and AAP. Bill's and Carole's MMPI-2-RF profiles were very similar, showing little or no emotional distress or disturbance and reflecting their high level of functioning overall. There were indications Carole had difficulty standing up for herself in personal relationships, while Bill could easily "mow people down" to get what he wanted. Interestingly, both of their Rorschach (R-PAS) protocols revealed a great deal of underlying distress and disturbance, which each of them kept out of awareness with exceptional psychological resources and coping mechanisms. Bill appeared to be quite narcissistically vulnerable and could be expected to respond with aggression and distorted thinking when he felt shame. There were suggestions that Bill had a great deal of unresolved trauma. Carole appeared to be highly emotionally sensitive, and likely to defer to others in close relationships. She also appeared to be managing a number of underlying painful emotions, which was not unexpected given the marital crisis.

The pattern of results fit with information that began to emerge from our interviews with the couple. Bill reiterated his narrative that Carole had "given him the cold shoulder" over the previous four to five years of the marriage, devoting herself to work and friends and avoiding physical affection and sex. Thus, he had sought friendship and comfort elsewhere. Bill admitted he had not spoken to Carole about his unhappiness

but could not explain why, and he had no idea why Carole might have pulled back from their relationship. At first, Carole denied that she had been more distant from Bill, pointing to functional ways she still did a lot for him and their relationship. However, gradually, she began to see that she may have “put up a wall” without realizing it. For example, Carole no longer talked to Bill about her work because he got angry if she did not follow his advice, and she stopped sharing her successes because typically he would grow jealous and pout. Also, Carole avoided certain social situations as a couple, because if she expressed opinions different from his, Bill would become enraged, demeaning, and berate her in the car on the way home. Last, Carole admitted she avoided sex and other physical contact with Bill, as he was often rough and ignored her pleas that she was in pain. Bill confirmed Carole’s account of these things in our conjoint sessions but seemed to have “forgotten” most of the incidents where he had acted badly until he was reminded. Even then, Bill had difficulty appreciating the effect of his behavior on Carole, often “turning the tables” to complain about her. I also found it very challenging in our individual sessions to help Bill explore what might underlie his aggressive and controlling outbursts; he kept explaining that this type of behavior had made him successful in his business, that he valued it, and he had difficulty going any deeper.

At this point in the TA, the three of us were faced with several major puzzles:

- (1) Why had Bill not spoken up directly about his desire for more attention and affection from Carole? What provoked his demeaning and aggressive behavior?
- (2) Why had Carole not stood up to Bill about his aggressive and demeaning behavior? Why had she stayed, and how had she kept herself from feeling unhappy with the marriage?

I was aware that cultural norms and gender-role expectations were relevant, especially in Bill’s and Carole’s generation. Carole had been “taught” that women should accept bad treatment from men and not confront them, although clearly she had defied this model in her work life. Bill had been “taught” that vulnerability and emotional longing were shameful for men, and that women were supposed to support men materially and emotionally and provide sex whenever it was requested. Although these cultural factors were compelling, I felt that more was at stake. And so, I asked Bill and Carole to complete the Early Memory Procedure and AAP.

AAP results

Bill’s AAP stories were lengthy and full of confusion and uncertainty and trauma markers. The resulting classification was Unresolved, and

his main regulating defense was cognitive disconnection, with several unresolved segregated systems in his response to the Cemetery scene. This story involved a man who felt isolated and guilty following a loss for which he was partly responsible. None of Bill's stories depicted attachment figures who were helpful, comforting, or loving, and instead parents were depicted as potential sources of fear and danger. Although I was aware that the unresolved story to Cemetery might reflect Bill's guilt over leaving Carole, I suspected there was early attachment trauma also (see Chapter 4). The picture of his childhood that emerged from his early memories was of alcoholic and neglectful parents involved in an ongoing marital "war"; Bill's emotional needs had not been attended to and frequently he had assumed adult responsibilities in the family. As a teen, Bill had felt alienated and inadequate relative to his peers, but later achieved social success by "learning to fight" and becoming a "bull" who could not be stopped. Although Bill could be charming and engaging when he was regulated, he was vulnerable to shame and to getting disorganized, at which point he could be quite aggressive. I suspected that for much of their relationship, Carole had supported Bill's self-esteem and kept him organized; similarly, he had provided a stable base for her. However, as Carole became more successful and independent, Bill felt abandoned emotionally, but was too ashamed to directly and vulnerably ask for attention. Instead, he had alternated between withdrawal and attacking.

Carole's AAP had many classic dismissing themes, with characters who coped with difficult feelings by achieving and "carrying on." This was her story to Window:¹

This is me... this is a girl...alone looking out the window.	
Looking for something <i>she doesn't know</i> what she is looking for. She's sad. And she's alone. And <i>doesn't know</i> what to do. Before she got to the window, she <i>I don't know</i> , was talking to someone in her family and was told to go away, go play or something like that. After she looks out the window for a while she leaves and <u>goes to her room and picks up a book</u> Why did the picture make me sad? (laugh) mean it did (sign) She's thinking I have to take care of myself and <i>How do I do that? I just don't know...</i> there's nobody there who's gonna take care of me. I have to take care of myself, whatever that means. And I don't mean in a physical needs way, but <i>I don't know</i> emotional way I think.	Disconnect Disconnect Agency: action Deactivate Disconnect Disconnect

Three of Carole's stories contained evidence of attachment trauma, and the overall classification of Carole's AAP was Unresolved with deactivation as the main regulating defense. The Unresolved classification was because of her story to the Departure scene. The story clearly reflected her experience of Bill's ending their marriage three months earlier.²

This is a story of a husband who's leaving his wife. He's got his <i>suit</i> on. And she's got her head slightly bowed and he's telling her something maybe why he's leaving. And she is looking sad and <i>bereft</i> . And he looks like of <i>galvanized</i> . Ready to leave.	Deactivate
She turns around and has a kind of <i>stunned</i> look on her face.	Trauma
She's got this big house and these kids and now she has to take care of it. All of it. And she's thinking <i>What happened. I don't understand. What?</i> And he says, "You know I'm leaving because I can't live with you anymore. You're not what I need, and I just want to get away." That sounds familiar doesn't it?	Disconnect
Before he got up and got dressed and as he usually does and she kind of <i>snoozed</i> a little bit to give him space to get dressed.	Deactivate
He then pulled out the suitcase and is <i>throwing the suitcase</i> .	Disconnect
And she's going, <i>Are you going on a business trip you didn't tell me about?</i> He said, "No, I'm not. I'm leaving you." And she is in <i>complete and utter shock. What?</i> He carried the ³ suitcases downstairs and was all feeling good about himself and <i>oblivious to what she was thinking or feeling</i> 'cause he really didn't care. He got in his car and said, "You should go in the house. The kids are about to get up," and he drove off.	Trauma
	Disconnect

As is evident, the segregated system in this story was not resolved. The woman is dysregulated (shock) and nobody comes to her aid. The man leaves her in this psychological state.

Carole's story to the subsequent picture, Bench, was also full of trauma. It concerned a woman who had received "some bad news" and was "in despair...alone...helpless." She was sitting down because "if she got up, she would probably fall down on the floor." In this story, however, the segregated systems were contained by Capacity to Act; the woman "pulled herself together" and went about her daily activities, even though she was full of despair and loss. I surmised that although Carole was functioning better than she had right after receiving Bill's email, her attachment system was still vulnerable to disorganization. From my discussions with Bill and Carole, I hypothesized that Carole's attachment status prior to the recent crisis was probably Dismissing, at least in recent years. Bill's description of Carole's "giving him the cold shoulder" fit exactly with what spouses of Dismissing partners experience (Tatkin, 2009). Also, Carole's not being in touch with her own dissatisfaction with the marriage and equating the functional care she did in the relationship with "showing love" fit with her having adopted a dismissing adaption.

Importantly, I suspected that Carole's dismissing defenses and vulnerability to disorganization predated her experiences with Bill. I knew that she had been married and divorced previously, and that her first husband had been emotionally abusive and denigrating. Eventually Carole had left him, finished her graduate studies, and married Bill. Also, although Carole had initially described her childhood as benign and her parents as "typical for their era," in her early memories and from our discussions

I learned that her father had been a highly narcissistic, distant, and demeaning man. Her mother, although caring and highly intelligent, had submerged herself in the marriage, putting much of her energy into tending to the household, supporting her husband's career, and both modeling and teaching Carole never to oppose her father. Carole described her mother as having "shut down" in the face of her father's derision and dominance. We agreed that this had left her mother less emotionally available to her, and this fit with Carole's story to the Bed scene of the AAP. In Carole's account, a mother is lecturing her son at bedtime about some "transgression" he committed during the day. The boy is distressed and crying and reaching to the mother for comfort, calling "mommy, mommy." The mother "withholds her affection" until she is finished speaking and then gives the child "a brief hug" and tells him to lay down and go to sleep.

As Carole and I discussed her AAP stories and early memories, she began to revise her understanding of her childhood and to solve the previously mentioned puzzles about the marriage, that is, how she had been able to put her own unhappiness with Bill aside and "carry on," and why she had not taken a stronger stance with Bill about his abusive behavior. Carole came to see that she had followed in her mother's footsteps in many ways, except that Carole had been able to build a life outside of her marriage, which in the end indirectly led to Bill's leaving. As the couples' TA moved toward its end, Carole had clearly grown a great deal in her self-understanding and seemed committed to repairing her marriage with Bill.

Conclusion of the couples' therapeutic assessment

However, Bill was in a different place. As mentioned earlier, I felt he had a hard time facing the personal issues that had emerged during the assessment: his neglectful and traumatized childhood, his vulnerability to shame, and his tendency to intimidate and control others to keep himself regulated. In an individual session with me, Bill confessed that he had never intended to use the couples' TA to come back together with Carole. Rather, his goal was to help Carole "understand his position" better so as to have a "less contentious divorce." I saw this disclosure as a test of whether I would side with him against Carole and told Bill I would not keep his intentions private from Carole. So, in our next conjoint session, Bill told Carole had no intention of reconciling and that he had invited her to Austin on false premises. Carole, understandably, was furious about being misled. Also, she managed to get Bill to admit that he was already sexually involved with another woman, which led to her also wishing to end the marriage. As the TA closed, I hoped that it had served as a kind of "postmortem" on the relationship, and that Bill and Carole better understood what had gone wrong in their marriage.

I suggested that each of them seek support as they finalized their divorce, and I agreed to help Carole find an individual therapist in her area to continue the work she had begun during the TA.

My work with Carole after the couples' therapeutic assessment

I used various professional contacts to identify potential therapists for Carole after she returned home, even interviewing some of them myself. Carole ended up having two to three sessions with two different therapists, both of whom she did not find very helpful. Then, she contacted me and asked if I would work with her, proposing we have regular virtual sessions interspersed with her coming to Austin several times a year for intensive work. I asked that Carole allow me to check with Bill, and he verified that he no longer wanted my services for either individual or couples' sessions, and said he hoped I could help Carole. So, approximately three months following the conclusion of the couples' TA, Carole and I began weekly virtual psychotherapy sessions.

Early phase of psychotherapy

Initially, our work centered on supporting Carole through the separation and divorce negotiations with Bill and making sense of all the intense feelings that were coming up. Although Carole understood intellectually that Bill and she could not stay together, she kept experiencing a great deal of grief about the relationship and longing to be with him. When this happened, she would become quite self-critical about her age and appearance and then fall into despair, envisioning herself being alone for the rest of her life. I sat with Carole in her grief without trying to cheer her up, validated that the end of the marriage was a huge loss, and tried to help her understand that her painful feelings were partly about Bill, but also probably about other attachment relationships. At my encouragement, Carole brought into therapy sessions a number of photos of herself and her family from when she was a child. We noticed how depressed her mother looked in all the photos, and how Carole herself looked shut down and tense after about age 5. I led her in some enactments in which we talked to "little Carole," a technique I had adapted from the Ideal Parent Figure Method (Brown & Elliot, 2016; Parra et al., 2017). These dialogues helped Carole become more aware of her deactivating attachment strategies. At first, when asked to offer reassurance and comfort, Carole would simply urge her younger self to "hang in there" and "be strong." With my help, she began to name and reflect the inner pain we saw, and to say "I know you are hurting. I love you and will not leave you; I will always be there for you." Also, Carole was able to use some of these phrases with herself at night, when her longing and

despair became overwhelming, and this helped calm her to some extent. I felt there was more we could do if we met in person, and Carole and I agreed she would come to Austin for some intensive work. Her main question for our sessions was: “Why am I still struggling with all this grief when I know I don’t want to be with Bill? And what can I do about this excruciating longing?” I hoped to help Carole understand the extent of her early attachment trauma so that she could have more compassion for her struggles at the time.

Return to Austin and second AAP administration

Thirteen months after the initial couples’ assessment, Carole came to Austin for three days. We met for six three-hour sessions, during which I repeated the MMPI-2-RF, Rorschach, and AAP, and we discussed them. As mentioned earlier, Carole’s original MMPI-2-RF had shown very little emotional distress, so it was interesting that on retest somewhat more pain was visible. The MMPI-2-RF also suggested that Carole was now more in touch with self-protective anger, which fit with my observations of how assertively she was handling the divorce negotiations with Bill. The R-PAS profile was much improved also, showing even stronger coping resources than on the original testing and more capacity for connecting to others.

However, the main event of our sessions that weekend centered on the AAP. The coded protocol showed substantial changes in Carole’s attachment representations. This time there were no unresolved segregated systems in any of the stories, the number of trauma indicators had decreased. Instead of the original Unresolved classification, the current AAP classification was Dismissing, Failed Mourning (see Chapter 4). Also, she demonstrated relationship Synchrony integration in response to the dyadic pictures (see Chapter 1). In Carole’s first Bed story, the mother withheld affection and lectured her son about a transgression. In her new Bed story, “...[he] extends his arms to her saying ‘I love you, mommy, I love you’ and she grabs him and holds him and says ‘I love you. I love you too.’ And then she kind of tickles him a little bit and they lie down and laugh together and snuggle for a little while...” I suspected this shift in Carole’s representation of attachment was a direct result of the psychotherapy sessions in which we had helped Carole “talk” to her distressed younger self in a soothing way.

Although these changes were all positive, I was very struck by Carole’s story to Window⁴:

<p>This little girl was walking through the living room and stopped to look out the window and she sees the big, beautiful tree. And she <i>wonders</i> about <i>its mystery and what it was like when it was a tiny little tree and how it grew to be so big and how old it was and</i></p>	<p>Disconnect Dereal – surreal</p>
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everything it had seen and how long it would be there. And she's kind of marveling at the tree. And she feels good about that. It's kind of like *between her and the tree*. She thinks about just kind of *being one with the tree*. And then once she is finished thinking about the tree she turned and went into the kitchen to have breakfast. She feels good about the tree. It's ancient but at the same time not. It makes her feel good about it and somehow it makes her feel good about herself too. She makes plans to go sit under the tree.

Agency: action

Agency: action

I remembered that Carole's previous story to this picture was of a little girl who was sad and alone and didn't know what to do with herself and so used deactivation ("picking up a book") to regulate her attachment system. I surmised that this time, the picture had activated the same kind of attachment distress in Carole, but she had not managed to deactivate, and so instead had ended regulating in derealization (i.e., depersonalization). I knew derealization was a dissociative coping mechanism associated with severe attachment trauma. In our next session, I decided to discuss my thoughts with Carole.

I showed the Window picture and read Carole her story. We appreciated together how the girl in the story had "made herself" feel good via her imagination. I asked Carole what the girl would have felt if she hadn't been able to fantasize.

CAROLE: I think she's feeling very alone and maybe abandoned but focusing on the tree helps her feel good.

STEVE: Yes, how creative! Do you think that same strategy ever worked for you?

CAROLE: I think it did when I was young. Then later I learned how to achieve in order to feel better.

STEVE: That seems right. I wonder, are you willing to do an experiment with me now?

CAROLE: Yes.

STEVE: Can you look hard at the picture, then close your eyes and imagine you are that little girl and there is no tree there to think about or activity you can do? Describe what you are feeling...

CAROLE: (*Long pause*) It's awful! I see black all around me. I am so scared that I want to scream, but I can't make a noise.

I asked Carole to "stay there" a bit longer. She nodded yes and fell silent. Her face looked anguished and frightened. Then Carole suddenly opened her eyes. I saw terror in her eyes and asked her to talk about what she had experienced. She described the feeling of being in a "black hole," completely alone and terrified, with nothing or no one to "grab

onto.” I asked if she would be willing to go back into that place one more time, but with me physically holding her hand. She gulped and nodded yes. I moved my chair closer and took her hand, she closed her eyes, and began to sob.

CAROLE: This is awful. I feel as if I’m floating in space. I am so incredibly scared. (*Crying hard.*) I don’t think I can stand this.

STEVE: Squeeze my hand! I’m right here. You’re in this awful place but I’ve got you. Stay with the feelings but listen to my words. Do you hear me?

CAROLE: Yes (*very softly*).

STEVE: I know you are terrified. I know you feel alone. But I’m here. You’re going to get through this. You’ve touched into something that is deep inside, an old feeling, an experience from long ago that was more than you could handle on your own. But you’re not alone anymore. I’m here. You’re going to come out of this, and you’re grown up now. This feeling is old. You survived it. Now you can always reach out to others. You can take care of this scared part of you and others will help.

Carole gradually grew calmer, opened her eyes, and looked confused. But almost immediately she grew curious about what had just happened, saying, “I never knew that was in there! What happened?” I told her I wanted her to come back fully to the room and then we would talk about her experience. She went to the restroom and washed her face, returned, and we talked for another 30 minutes. I explained that I thought she had re-experienced an old attachment trauma, where she was alone and terrified and overwhelmed. She was in awe of the experience and what it meant. She agreed it was very likely that her mother had been so depressed at times that she had been left absolutely alone as a small child. After a while, I noticed Carole’s eyes drooping, and when I asked, she admitted she was exhausted. We agreed to stop, she left and went to her hotel knowing she could call me that night if she needed to. When we met the next morning, Carole said she had eaten something light, then fallen into bed and slept deeply all night. She said she had awoken feeling calm and “freer,” as if she had cast off a burden she hadn’t even known she was carrying.

We spent the rest of the closing session discussing the meaning of the experience with the Window story the day before. I again explained that I believed Carole had suffered severe attachment trauma as a child, and that this was why she was still struggling with painful feelings now that Bill was gone. I interpreted that these feelings were why she had been unable to leave Bill, or even let herself know she was unhappy in the marriage, because there was no way she could have faced them on her own. Carole understood this and seemed more forgiving of herself for staying with Bill and for longing for him after the relationship ended, saying, “I now see it wasn’t Bill I was longing for, but for someone to care for me.”

Carole was also more accepting of why she was not “all better” at that point in time. I promised her that we would continue to work on these issues in psychotherapy, and that I had ideas of what might help her more.

Next year of psychotherapy and third AAP administration

Carole and I continued to meet virtually for psychotherapy after she returned home, and we both noticed a shift that we attributed to our work in Austin with the AAP stimulus. She continued to feel freer and had more energy. She began to explore dating, and we spent sessions talking about those experiences, and in particular about one man she felt very attracted to who would pursue her and then disappear, only to contact her again and seek closeness. Over time, Carole became more and more skeptical of this man, and could see that he was not available as a partner because of his obvious ambivalence about intimacy. Carole also began to explore other interests and decided to take graduate courses in religion, a topic she had long wanted to study. I suggested Carole supplement our therapy sessions with some therapeutic body work, as my clinical experience had taught me this was an effective adjunct to therapy in clients with early trauma. Carole had several sessions with a practitioner certified in Somatic Experiencing (Levine, 1997), and these seemed to have a good impact.

A little over three years after the original couples’ TA, Carole came to Austin again for three days of in-person sessions, with the goal of our continuing to think about her next growth steps. Once again, we repeated the AAP. To my satisfaction, this time the protocol was classified Secure. I felt this result reflected the good work we had done in therapy and the healing I had seen in Carole over the previous year. This time, there were even more signs of good Synchrony and Connection. Her security was evident in Corner⁵:

This little boy is in a corner and being *punished* for *some infraction*. But he’s been holding up his hands, *arguing* with his mother that he shouldn’t be in the corner... saying *I didn’t do it. I didn’t do it*. And he’s turning his head, which means probably he may have done it, and he’s trying to convince her that he didn’t do it. Before she put him in the corner and he’s *mad* about it. Claimed he didn’t do it. Since he can’t convince her, he stays in there the full 10 minutes and his *anger* kind of dissipates because he knows he did it. About the end of the 10 minutes, he calms down and she comes in the room and says, “It’s okay, time out is over. And he says, “I’m sorry.” And she says, “Okay, come here.” and he went to her, and *she hugged him and said she loved him* and that sometimes people do bad things but it doesn’t mean they’re bad and *she loves him*. He says, “I love you too, mommy.”

Deactivate
Disconnect
Deactivate &
Agency: action
Disconnect
Disconnect
Agency: haven of
safety, repair
Agency: haven of
safety, repair

As you can see, there still were a number of attachment defenses present in the story, but these all were in the service of repair and integration. How was this kind of change in Carole's attachment representation reflected in her life? She was more connected to friends, more content with the idea that she might not be partnered again, and more adept at figuring out what she wanted from life and pursuing it. She had decided to seek a graduate degree in religion and was getting top grades in her program. Although Carole could be self-critical of her appearance still, she was doing less of that. And to my eye, she was more alive, more expressive emotionally, and handling a myriad of life challenges with resilience and good judgment. For example, Carole still had some dealings with Bill over joint financial holdings, but she felt little turmoil when he tried to charm or bully her, easily setting limits in a calm but firm manner. In fact, she told me she now felt grateful that Bill had left her, as it had spurred her work with me, and she now was happier in her life than she ever remembered.

Afterthoughts and a brief poem from Carole

Carole and I continue to meet from time to time for virtual therapy sessions. The COVID pandemic has prevented us from seeing each other in person recently, but it has also seemed less urgent to do so. When I talked to Carole about writing this chapter, she was open to my doing so and was very curious. This spurred our discussing important events in the therapy, and in particular Carole's "trip to the black hole" several years back via the AAP Window picture. She said she thought this was a crucial experience in our work together and that coming through that experience had truly shifted much of the grief she had been harboring. I shared with Carole a poem I had come across on therapy by Nayyirah Waheed in her 2013 book *Salt*. It opens with the phrase, "The hard season will split you through..." and describes the anguish and grief that will come up for clients in deep psychotherapy until "the soft season" comes, "to drink all the damage into love" (p. 9). Carole was touched by the poem and thought it beautifully captured her experiences in therapy. She then sent me a new ending, dedicated to me in gratitude of what "we had accomplished together":

Do not worry,
you will
begin to breathe again
and see
the colors of joy as
the pain recedes and is absorbed
as a wave on the shore.
Do not worry,

because darkness will become light and
you will forgive yourself as shame washes away.
Do not worry, it will come,
you will recognize the Beloved you are.

Of course, I was moved and grateful, and also felt humbled by the privilege of working with someone like Carole. In addition, I was very thankful for the power of the AAP and eager to tell other clinicians about its power as a tool in psychotherapy.

Notes

- 1 Italics = defenses; underline = capacity to act
- 2 Italics = defenses; bold = trauma;
- 3 Italics = defenses; bold = trauma
- 4 Italics = defenses; bold = trauma; underline = capacity to act
- 5 Italics = defenses; underline = capacity to act

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