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The Experience of Being a Therapist for a Much Younger Client

Dr Tony McSherry

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Summary by Frank Kelley

Dr Tony McSherry is an Existential-Analytical Psychotherapist working in private practise. He is a member of the Constructivist and Existential College of the UKCP through the Southern Association for Psychotherapy and Counselling. His main psychotherapeutic interests are in phenomenology and psychoanalysis. His website is <https://speakingforyourself.co.uk/>

Tony discussed the phenomenology of an imaginary adult client, one much younger than the therapist. He discussed how therapy is co-produced, the attempts to avoid the alienation involved in such moves, and the grief involved in letting the other live their own life.

Tony has been a psychotherapist for thirty years including fourteen years in the NHS. He now practices privately, in person and online, from Hale Village in Liverpool.

His client in this discussion is imaginary.

Tony is interested in phenomenology, the philosophical study of the structures of experience and consciousness, particularly the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl. To let things appear to you, to let things show themselves. He thinks the close attention of the phenomenologists is something they have in common with Sigmund Freud who had an interest in the work of Husserl.

This imaginary twenty year old man man could not pay for therapy. His fees were paid by his mother who wanted to come into the room. He enters the therapy room and looks round like an animal. Tony needs to note what is in front of him. He likes the advice of the avant-garde composer John Cage. *The best we can do is get out of the way.*

This client spent a lot of time in his room at home playing computer games. Tony felt he was being judged on what was in the therapy room. The clients parents thought he needed to speak to someone and worried about his preference for virtual reality. They wanted him to find a girlfriend but he thought love was for girls.

This man knew about Freud but thought he was mad or a pervert and only saw rich people.

Tony felt tempted to advise his client to go out and live and make his own mistakes, rather than have therapy, and come back in a few years if things got too much.

After this first session Tony was emailed by the clients mother to say her boy was doing better. His parents could become a problem for Tony too. Tony's job was to open up a space for his client, who he felt would know soon enough if he was colluding with the parents. Tony worried he might become like them. He thought the world was a frightening place for his client.

Weeks past and the young man felt better and lectured Tony on why Freud as good but Lacan was better. Tony wondered if his client was saying what Tony wanted to hear. Lacan instructs us to seek the Other. The task for Tony was to help this man feel safe enough to hear his own words and make his own way and try not to collude with authority, Later in therapy this young man, not his mother, arranged his own sessions.

There is a loneliness in working with people and needing to let them go.

There is a legal term *differens*. This is what happens if you are trying to explain yourself and others turn it into what they think,. *Differens* thus elides others' experience.

Thank you to Dr Tony McSherry. While listening to him I regretted being retired. I would have loved to have seen how I could incorporate his profound and useful thoughts into my counselling practice.