

JAINE L. DARWIN

* DISTINGUISHED EDUCATOR AWARDEE

Pro Bono Work With Families of Soldiers: Nachtraglichkeit in the Countertransference

Freud uses the term "nachtraglichkeit" to refer to a deferred action, an event whose memory becomes traumatic because of what it triggers affectively in the present that could not be felt in the past. Since 2004, I have Co-Directed SOFAR: Strategic Outreach to Families of All Reservists, a pro bono mental health project that provides support, psychotherapy, psycho-education and prevention services to the extended family members of National Guard and other Military Reservists from deployment through the long process of reunion and reintegration. In this capacity I have been exposed to populations completely foreign to me, members of military families and the military hierarchy from the rank of private to the rank of general.

As someone who came of age during the War in Vietnam and whose participation was solely as a protester, I came to this project with many preconceived notions about these people and their motivations, their priorities and their dissimilarity to me. As with all things clinical and human, a relationship changes perceptions. As I have met the leaders and worked with the families, I have been compelled to wrestle with feelings in the present and feelings about my thoughts and actions in the past about the military and their family members. In struggling to explain to myself, the intensity of my countertransference reactions, I came to understand the concept of nachtraglichkeit related to my history as a protestor and even earlier, my failure to be empathic to the experience of my mother as the wife of a soldier wounded in World War II. This paper will draw on both clinical experiences and personal experiences of the analyst.

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