

BOOK REVIEW

The Evolution of a Therapist

*Louis Cozolino's Companion Guides for the Journey of
Becoming a Therapist and Building a Satisfying Career*

by Louis Cozolino

W. W. Norton, 2021

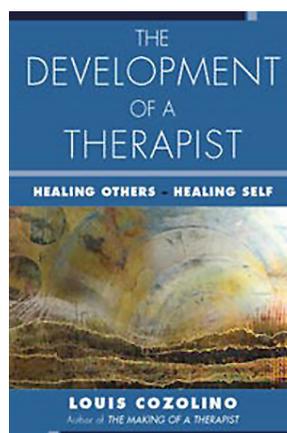
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The Making of a Therapist

Louis Cozolino
Paperback

ISBN 9780393713947
140 × 211 mm ■ 240 pages
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Both books, published by Norton in their Interpersonal Neurobiology Series, abide by the goal of the series to “*advance our understanding of human experience by finding the unity of knowledge, or consilience, that emerges with the translation of findings from numerous domains of study into a common language and conceptual framework. The series integrates the best of modern science with the healing art of psychotherapy.*”

Louis Cozolino, the series editor, is a writer, teacher, and psychologist practicing in Los Angeles. A professor at Pepperdine University since 1986, he lectures worldwide on psychotherapy, neuroscience, trauma, and attachment¹.

Cozolino's primary focus is on connection, attunement, and interaction. Working principally from a psychodynamic model, he employs strategies and techniques from other modalities, including CBT, family systems, and a humanistic/existential approach.

1. See Louis Cozolino website <https://www.drloucozolino.com/about>

These books ask essential questions:

- Do you believe therapists should give priority to their rational, trained, professional voice? Should their inner self, body sensations, feelings, thoughts, and doubts – regardless of whether they whisper or shout – remain in the passenger seat?
- If you are a teacher or supervisor, what might you say to new and future therapists?
- What is the most precious advice you could offer?
- What are the key elements that transform a student from a good to an excellent therapist?
- If you are a new therapist, what are the dominant anxieties, fears, and issues you will need to come to terms with?

Cozolino's companion books offer refreshing answers to these and many other questions. *The Making of a Therapist* is a gentle guide for beginning therapists, describing the journey from its first steps all the way to a fully established practice. *The Development of a Therapist* copes with the everyday personal and professional challenges therapists encounter.

The answers Cozolino provides are based on a vital axiom: therapists are human beings with their own demons (*The Development of a Therapist*, p. 146) who have "to learn to learn" (p. 157), and merge opposing worlds by developing the "... ability to be simultaneously thoughtful and emotional, to mix the poetry of human connection with a scientific mind, is the essence of a good psychotherapist" (*The Making of a Therapist*, p. 2).

In both books, the presentation is flowing, comprehensive, and simple – though far from simplistic. Each page is packed with useful information and fresh perspectives about the core and serious issues of our profession – transference, countertransference, resistance, defenses – and the challenges both new and seasoned therapists encounter. Cozolino's writing style conveys the experience of being with him in a relaxed setting, engaged in authentic conversation about what preoccupies our mind as therapists. His language is calming, the results are fruitful, and the witty headings reflect his ability to transform and translate scientific knowledge into comprehensive and familiar everyday images. Each chapter offers an inspiring quote – from Plato and Ovid to Oscar Wilde and Anais Nin, among others – in perfect harmony with the chapter's content. Thus, each challenge presented is transformed into a manageable, inspiring task.

The books present usual, and unusual, challenges and case vignettes that both new and seasoned therapists will face over the course of their careers. Cozolino offers insights and fresh coping perspectives for every challenge. He connects the dots between what may seem to be unrelated facts, offering a better view into the client's world. Nonetheless, he never loses sight that his most important offering is bringing therapists into the therapeutic relationship as human beings, not only as experts.

"... therapy is not a set of techniques; it also requires you to be aware of your own fears and needs. It is a challenge to give others what we may never have received ourselves." (*The Development of a Therapist*, p. 5)

The underlying dictum is "know yourself," which Cozolino considers to be the wise road of action, before, during, and after every therapy session.

The Making of a Therapist

In *The Making of a Therapist*, Cozolino anchors his insights, experience, suggestions, and questions in his own journey as therapist. The book opens with the description of his own first session, and the five points his supervisor had told him to remember during his first therapeutic hour. He starts by exploring the inner thoughts of the therapist, and how to handle them through centering and learning to listen. He offers practical suggestions on centering and listening, on the details of eye contact, chair position, and the importance of communication styles.

His advice regarding practical issues, though often familiar, also offers not so expected advice regarding the therapist's feelings, thoughts, and inner world. He reminds us that the world of therapists is intrinsically connected to that of their clients.

The following chapters offer valuable information regarding the therapeutic experience itself – what to say, what to do, how to conceptualize cases and plan treatments, how to face pathology,

deal with the unexpected, and use crises as a communication tool. He devotes a full chapter to the dangers of cultural and religious assumptions and prejudice. In the chapter “Challenges and Strategies,” he offers valuable advice on how to use mistakes, silence, and transference along with the kind of questions therapists should ask themselves in these situations. He focuses on the therapeutic power of confusion and of *good* mistakes. A most interesting chapter deals with the therapist’s feelings, their power, the importance of bringing them to the surface, and if necessary, to supervision. He gives special attention to impatience, sexual attraction, and regression, all the while emphasizing the constant need for therapists to heal themselves. He offers ways to manage client resistance as it presents in the form of cancellations, rejection of the therapist, premature termination, fee issues, and interpretation challenges.

After dealing with these practical matters, Cozolino moves on to focus on the person of the therapist. He describes the therapist’s challenges during sessions, including the oscillation between the therapist’s world and that of the client, and oscillations between the mind and the body. He addresses the challenge of feeling difficult emotions, such as distraction, boredom, and fatigue, once more offering questions that help therapists clarify situations and find solutions.

Next, he delves further into “knowing yourself” in terms of countertransference, offering exercises on uncovering it, and accepting the healer’s innate vulnerability. He looks at the effects of the therapist’s childhood and past struggles, and how their character structure might play out in the therapy room. Finally, he offers valuable advice on building a “*satisfying and sane career*” (p. 72) by following four principles and asking reasonable questions.

Though training institutions present the same knowledge, this book offers all that a therapist needs to know, in a compact and easily searchable format.

The Development of a Therapist

In his second book, Cozolino traces the deepening evolution of the therapist-client relationship. He explores how therapist and client are interconnected, and how healing is an evolving, intertwined parallel process within a deeply interwoven connection affecting both therapist and client.

Cozolino deepens our understanding of therapy by delving into more abstract definitions and concepts. He explores the many approaches therapists can use to relate to clients, and brings together a range of therapeutic tools, approaches, and results, along with the latest research on neural networks and systems knowledge.

Cozolino calls the therapist who regulates anxiety an *amygdala whisperer* (p. 5). Based on this definition, he underlines basic traits an amygdala whisperer must develop – the ability to see multiple truths simultaneously (p. 13), and the ability to take responsibility for helping clients find the safety they lack, regardless of their defenses (p. 15). Here, his guidance centers on how to “*venture beyond the rational*,” and how to practice “*relaxed curiosity and shuttling*,” which he defines as “*an open exploration, a journey of free-floating attention through the many dimensions of self and other within the therapeutic relationship* (p. 21).” Other issues explored include the “*navigation of the therapeutic space*,” the secret of redirecting clients to “*say more in the therapy and focus on here and now*,” respect for “*the circular awareness*” offered by the right cortical hemisphere, and the use of “*free-floating attention*” as a precious ally. He employs the “*paradox of resistance*” and “*listening with the third ear*” as useful therapeutic allies.

Using case vignettes, he also talks about the origins of intergenerational trauma, how to recognize clues that deepen client narratives and the therapist’s need for reflection when they must cope with the challenge to “*stay in role, when our bodies and personal histories are making us want to run or steer our clients away from what we find difficult to tolerate* (p. 62).”

At this point, he takes a deep dive into the mind of the therapist (p. 63), the mind of the client (p. 88), and the mind of the body (p. 102), describing and connecting their interaction and influence on the therapeutic evolution.

Next, under the challenging titles “What do zombies do for fun?” and “From terror to safety,” Cozolino describes client cases. He skillfully interweaves case descriptions with neuroscience principles and his own reflections. He deals with internet and screen addiction and its effects on relationships, in particular parent-child relationships.

The book ends by exposing what he sees as the fallacies of therapy trainings. He points out that current trainings involve “*nothing about protecting the public or how we need to uphold higher standards* (p. 194).” He suggests that all new students take control of their training and ends the book by saying that “*if you are to build a meaningful career as a psychotherapist, you have to learn, first and foremost, how to silence your mind, listen to your heart and pursue knowledge* (p. 198).”

Conclusion

Regardless of where you find yourself on the therapy continuum – trainee, intern, novice therapist, experienced therapist, supervisor, or trainer – these two books are desktop material offering tools, ideas, explanations, perceptions, and critical questions that clarify challenges and issues on personal, relational, and professional levels. Their most important contribution, however, lies in the questions Cozolino believes therapists should ask themselves – questions that lead to looking deep inside our humanity in order to look deep inside our clients, connect with them authentically, and help them reach their therapeutic goals.



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