*Psychoanalytic Quarterly, LXIV, 1995*

# OF CREATURES LARGE AND SMALL: SIZE ANXIETY, PSYCHIC SIZE, SHAME, AND THE ANALYTIC SITUATION

BY BENJAMIN KILBORNE

*The author investigates what he terms "size anxiety" and "psychic size." Psychic size is composed of experiences of smallness and largeness with respect to parental figures, fantasies of being large or small, and the meanings of such experiences and fantasies in specific two-person situations. Size anxiety includes the anxiety about being a particular size with respect to a significant other (real or fantasized). Drawing on* Gulliver's Travels *and on Ferenczi's paper on Gulliver fantasies, the author discusses how experiences of psychic size, rivalry, and shame provide important analytic material. Dreams and clinical vignettes illustrate the thesis.*

## INTRODUCTION

A fact of human existence, psychic size figures prominently in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis in indicating the way each patient feels about his/her own body in relation to that of the analyst. It can also represent a variety of feelings and fantasies about the analytic relationship, an awareness of which can be of

The development of this paper owes much to the participants in the American Psychoanalytic Association's workshop, "Shame Dynamics," at which the paper was presented in May 1993. Particular thanks go to Ana-Maria Rizzuto, Leon Wurmser, Melvin Lansky, Andrew Morrison, Anna Janicki, Ruth Lax, Peter Rudnytsky, and Raphael and Rena Moses. I also wish to thank Gyorgy Hidas, Judit Mezaros, and Eva Brabant, all of whom encouraged an earlier version of the paper, and Barbara Young and the Philadelphia Psychoanalytic Society for having given me the opportunity to present these issues in the fall of 1992.





considerable assistance in furthering analytic work. In addition, psychic size is related to standards of judgment by which each patient evaluates himself or herself and the analyst. These standards are often important elements in unconscious fantasy systems.

Psychic size is necessarily "relative size," which suggests a relationship with the analyst in which the analyst is experienced as either larger or smaller than the patient. The use of the couch is obviously important here, as it literally "reduces" the size of the patient, dropping her or him to beneath the eye level of even the most diminutive analyst. Among the various features of the couch, therefore, are influences on the perceptions of size together with what these perceptions are experienced to mean. Patients may well feel that they become small in the eyes of their analysts by lying down. Such feelings, which I have found to be common among my patients, can be related to the well-known "tall man" in Greek dreams.

In ancient Greece, important dreamers were visited by the "tall man": he stood over the dreamer who was actually lying down in the dream. Towering over the horizontal dreamer, this tall man proceeded to tell the dreamer that he or she was asleep, after which the dream proper could begin. Such narrative conventions served to frame the dream, to set it apart from ordinary experience, and to underscore the differences between "lowly" humans, on the one hand, and the Olympian gods and their messengers, on the other. Commonly used in Greek literature, the "tall man" indicated relative status, reminding mortals by his presence how great are the gods, and how small and insignificant by contrast are human lives.

Asclepius appeared in curative dreams precisely as had the "tall man" in ancient Greece. Worshipers of the cult of Asclepius, the most prevalent religion in the early Christian period and the one considered to present the greatest threat to burgeoning Christianity, sought "true" curative dreams modeled after those in which the "tall man" had appeared. Pilgrims to the sanctuaries of Asclepius who sought curative dreams would

dream that the god of healing towered over them and proceeded to operate on them, to give them advice, or to show them how to cure their afflictions.[1]

It seems to me that the analytic positions (analyst sitting in chair able to see patient, patient lying on couch unable to see analyst) may have been derived in part from such literary conventions, since we know that Freud was familiar with them and perhaps identified himself with Asclepius. It can even be speculated that narrative conventions from ancient Greece may have contributed to the development of Freud's concept of the transference, a major feature of which is dreaming about the analyst. What we know is that differences of size do affect fantasies and that these size fantasies contribute to that regression associated with the use of the couch. Differences of size help to develop the transference and are "enlarged upon" as a consequence of the working through of the transference.

Much of our assessment of ourselves and of others relies upon metaphors and experiences of relative size—upon what I have called "psychic size." Thus, psychic size is directly related not only to fantasies of the body ego but also to the ego ideal. Psychic size is therefore important for an understanding of transference (and countertransference) phenomena. Size is not only an external, objective fact, as scales of measurement would have it; it is an essential, subjective feature of psychic life to which relatively little attention has been paid. Common figures of speech provide us with ample evidence that much of our evaluation of ourselves depends upon comparing ourselves with others. Consider, for example, expressions such as "a tall order," " small-minded," "to look down on someone," "to look down one's nose at someone," or other expressions such as "that was large (or small) of him," "high office," "high-minded," "low-

[1] The authoritative work on the cult of Asclepius is that of Emma and Ludwig Edelstein (1945). Dodds (1951) and others speak of the "tall man" in Greek dreams, as does Chitty (1966) who writes about two desert fathers known as "the Tall Brothers": they appeared in dreams during the early Christian period as had the tall man in classical Greece (see also Kilborne, 1987).



brow," and "lower (or upper) class." In our Greek tradition Olympian beings tower over the lot of us mortals, as we were towered over by our parents when we were small. We "look up to" these Olympian beings, whether parental or mythical.

Sometimes the physical size of our mythical beings (e.g., Gargantua, Paul Bunyan) can be a defense against feeling small and being "belittled." Or diminutive persons (e.g., Tom Thumb, "The Little Tailor") can provide symbols for those who feel belittled. The Little People in Ireland and various other imaginary beings are thought to be significantly (as opposed to insignificantly) small. *Gulliver's Travels* was written by an Irishman astonishingly sensitive to the meanings of size. Far from being a "fact" or an "event" which can be measured, psychic size is a process, a phenomenon deeply rooted in the beholder, in childhood experiences and family relationships with their dynamics of idealization, competition, hostility, envy, and shame. Our size changes as we grow, and as we grow, we "size" ourselves, trying on images of ourselves "for size."

But differences in size are more complicated than my exposition thus far would suggest, since shame and embarrassment and "size anxiety" can result equally from being large as from being small. Over and above actual relative size, there are feelings and fantasies of smallness or largeness. Those persons who are "oversized," unusually tall or stout, often feel no less anxious about their size than those who are unusually small. And to these "sizings" must be added persons with body image distortions, such as those with eating disorders.

Therefore, psychic size is context-dependent in important psychodynamic ways. In the analytic situation analyst and patient are defined in terms of each other, there being no such thing as smallness or largeness except with respect to oneself. This self-referential character of psychic size and size anxiety together with their corresponding narcissistic fantasies are, as we shall see, of particular relevance for analytic work. Fantasizing oneself to be small, for example, can express both feelings of helplessness and humiliation (being constantly "overlooked" or

too conspicuous to fit in) and feelings of rage, rivalry, and danger (not wanting to appear "too big for one's breeches," endangering others). Similarly, fantasizing oneself to be large can be a compensatory defense against feelings of helplessness and humiliation as well as expressions of feelings of rage and destructiveness.

In this paper, I shall elaborate on the notion of psychic size and size anxiety, relating them to the dynamics of shame and the feelings and perceptions of body image. The positive or negative valence placed upon being large or small is quite distinct from actual size and from fantasies of size. Being large can be perceived as an asset, just as it can be perceived as symbolic of some basic flaw. Similarly, smallness can be a symbol of being endearing, just as it can symbolize feelings of insignificance. The primary reality is psychic reality.[2]

*Psychic Size in Brobdingnag and Lilliput*

In *Gulliver's Travels* Jonathan Swift (1726) provides what is perhaps the most far-reaching literary exploration of psychic size. Swift describes to scale Gulliver's reactions to the size of the inhabitants whose countries he is visiting (one twelfth the size of ordinary mortals in Lilliput; twelve times their size in Brobdingnag). Swift is as faithful to his renderings of Gulliver's perceptions—no matter what his size—as is a mapmaker to the lands and seas he maps.

You will perhaps recall the scene in which Gulliver finds himself in Brobdingnag, in a field of reapers, about to be stepped on. The towering figure closest was "as tall as an ordinary spire-

[2] Psychic reality here includes the evaluation of whatever psychic size one feels oneself to be. Thus there are judgments brought to bear on body ego, together with one's feelings about it. Although I cannot here elaborate on ego-ideal dimensions of size anxiety, these are clearly present and related to shame (see Kilborne, 1992, 1994, 1995; Wurmser, 1981).



steeple," "took about ten yards at every stride," and spoke "in a voice many degrees louder than a speaking trumpet" (p. 124). When this reaper came close, Gulliver felt utterly diminutive, powerless, and terrified of being crushed by a being so gigantic he would not even know he had eliminated a life from the face of the earth. The situation can be compared to that of a very small bug about to be sat on by a heavyweight champion.

> I lamented my own folly and wilfulness in attempting a second voyage against the advice of all my friends and relations. In this terrible agitation of mind I could not forbear thinking of Lilliput, whose inhabitants looked upon me as the greatest prodigy that ever appeared in the world . . . . I reflected what a mortification it must prove to me to appear as inconsiderable in this nation as one single Lilliputian would appear among us (p. 125).

In his terror, Gulliver does what we often do when experiencing ourselves as diminutive: we imagine a time when we could "lord it over" others, be they baby sisters, brothers, animals, teddy bears—in short, whoever can make us feel larger by comparison. And Swift adds: "Undoubtedly philosophers are in the right when they tell us, that nothing is great or little otherwise than by comparison" (p. 125).

Being tiny in relation to huge creatures is by definition an infantilizing position. Whereas in Lilliput Gulliver is sought after by the navy, able to determine the outcome of battles, and prized for his strength and size, in Brobdingnag Gulliver is a plaything of the Queen and of children: to be played with but not taken seriously. In Lilliput, Gulliver is envied; in Brobdingnag, he is constantly humiliated and made to feel utterly insignificant. The envious Lilliputians try to put out Gulliver's eyes while he is drugged, on the principle that if he does not see them, he cannot perceive them to be as small as they are by comparison; then they can be as large as they wish and avoid the humiliation of seeing themselves through his eyes.

It was the genius of Jonathan Swift to have made *Gulliver's Travels* stand for the dynamics of differences in size.[3] But he did still more. He not only depicted perceptible differences of size, he also represented attendant *feelings* of largeness and smallness which in fantasy may be related to helplessness, competition, envy, rage, and shame.

Real differences in size do give rise to *fantasies* about what smallness and bigness mean and have meant. Whereas some psychologies seem preoccupied with external measurements of various kinds, tending to stop at the literal interpretation of bigness and smallness, psychoanalytic inquiry and treatment begin there, dealing essentially with internal fantasies.

### *Psychic Size and Size Anxiety*

It is striking that the anxiety, shame, humiliation, and competition entailed in what I am calling psychic size are not related to either smallness or largeness. This point was made by Ferenczi, who opens his 1927 paper on Gulliver fantasies by suggesting that dreams "in which giants and dwarfs make their appearance are generally, though not invariably, characterized by marked anxiety" (p. 44). It may be pertinent to note that Freud's *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* was published in 1926, and to suggest that the most significant contribution in Ferenczi's paper is the link he makes between size and anxiety.

> The sudden appearance of giants or magnified objects is always the residue of a childhood recollection dating from a time when, because we ourselves were so small, all other objects seemed gigantic. An unusual reduction in the size of objects and persons, on the other hand, is to be attributed to the compensatory wish-fulfilling fantasies of the child who wants to reduce the proportions of the terrifying objects in his environment to the smallest possible size (p. 44).

[3] The origin of the term "Gulliver fantasies" is obscure. Freud only briefly alludes to Gulliver in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900, pp. 30, 469).



The clinical picture, however, is considerably more complicated than Ferenczi made it out to be. Smallness in fantasy can be not only a throwback to infantile experience, but also a defense against feeling large, powerful, and threatening. One can feel small so as not to feel dangerous. Just as one can feel large so as not to feel insignificant and powerless.[4]

One analytic patient of mine, whose narcissistic defenses were particularly robust, was troubled very early in the analysis by the fact that I was very tall (6′3″) and that she was very small (barely 5′). I was continually struck by the various uses to which this discrepancy in size was put. For instance, she felt so criticized by the implicit comparison between our heights that she did not look at me at all for years after beginning the analysis. She refused to feel she had to "look up" to me, wanting to be autonomous and independent. She felt that my being tall was an affront to her desire to be "grown up." And she felt that I was a threat to her abilities to deal with problems of body image (she had been bulimic). She spoke repeatedly of her enthusiasm for the women in films who could demonstrate an ability to be just as strong as (or stronger than) the men. Films like *Thelma and Louise* fascinated her, since she felt she had to combat the desire to be protected and taken care of by a large parental figure. In part, my size was threatening to her because of her need to have me take care of her.

She had dreams of being small, like the following:

> I am in a house, the rooms of which are arranged in a row such that you have to go through some to get to the others. I live in

[4] For these remarks I am indebted to Raphael and Rena Moses. As I have discussed elsewhere (Kilborne 1994), Ferenczi is, in his *Gulliver* text, "shrinking" his rival Rank and diminishing the importance of his theories in an effort to secure his place as the father's (Freud's) favorite son. In his *Gulliver* text, which focuses on Swift's absent father and Swift's difficulty in working through his oedipal conflicts, Ferenczi seems to be speaking about an insufficiently available Freud, toward whom he is unable to express and work through competitive, negative feelings. On the Freud-Ferenczi relationship see, most recently, Dupont (1994); see also Haynal (1988); Hoffer (1991); Kilborne (1994); and Saborin (1985).

this house with my mother and maternal grandmother and my sister. My mother and grandmother are not there, and my sister is asleep on one of the trapezoidal beds in the house. I am in the middle room trying to cheer up a little girl about six years old staring off into space, just looking at the walls. She is not as cute as I was, but she seems to be me in the dream.

Associations included not knowing she was lonely because she did not know what loneliness was, and persistent feelings of smallness when growing up. When there were lapses in empathy, she described feelings of shrinking, as though I did not want her to be important to me, and that was why she felt unimportant. By not responding to her needs, whether conscious or unconscious, I was making her shrink; I was belittling her.

When I went away for a few days in August roughly two years into the analysis, she dreamed:

> I was pregnant. I had not gained much weight, and the affair was painless. The baby was born and weighed something like 3 pounds. But when it was born it began shrinking until it was no larger than a dipstick. I wrapped it up in paper, but kept forgetting it and feared it would get sat on. It looked like a cartoon character.

Thus, after an absence of mine, this patient dreams of being pregnant. The baby in the dream shrinks rather alarmingly, and is in danger of being forgotten or sat on, clearly a fear of hers in the transference: she could not be important to me if I was leaving her. In her associations, the following idea emerged: I could not know how important it was to her that she be important to me. Had I understood that, I would not have left. She spoke both of her wish to go away with me and her fear that she was not significant enough to do so, or I would have taken her. So my leaving meant to her that there was something essential about her emotional life which I refused to grasp.

A repetition of the childhood experience of dwindling when her mother was absent or unavailable, her fear of dwindling during my absence carries with it an awareness that something is wrong, as well as anxiety about recognizing the size of her need for me. The dream also represents an experience of not being able to maintain her size in my absence, of literally being diminished. Indeed, for years thereafter when significant others did not give her the impression she was important "enough" to them, she would feel she was shrinking.



In this case, then, actual differences in physical size gave scope for unconscious fantasies which became important for the development and the analysis of the transference. And these physical differences in size had psychological overtones in terms of her experiences of gender. Since she associated being male with being powerful, and being female with being overpowered and helpless, differences in size between the two of us were used in fantasy to confirm fears that being a woman means submitting to the man in the most humiliating and degrading fashion, since he will overpower her if she does not. Such fantasies about her own womanhood and my manhood, together with what these mean, were picked up in her experiences of differences in our sizes, yet another reminder of the importance of Freud's observation that the ego is first and foremost a body ego.

### *Psychic Size, Shame, and Body Image*

Size symbolism brings the infant into a world of comparisons in which others are either larger or smaller. Together with this basic classificatory parceling out of family members and other beings, psychic size requires that meanings be given to both size and "relative" size. For example, if you are taller than I am, it is clear that I feel myself to be the measure of your height. If you are smaller than I am, I am equally the measure of your height. But what happens if you, seeing me, feel yourself to be the measure of my height? Assuming we are of different heights,

what happens when two subjects both feel themselves to be the standard against which others are measured? And what happens if children or adults abdicate their subjectively driven sense of scale?

Such comparisons in size become conscious, and are part of self-consciousness and self-orientation. In other words, they are both basic and essential. The very ideas of "smallness" and of "largeness" as qualities are derived from our experiences as infants and children in the process of "growing up." We do not "grow down," of course. "Upness" is associated with growth and with the things everyone aspires to. We want to "live up" to the expectations of ourselves and of others.

In the analytic situation, all differences between the analyst and analysand can fruitfully come under analytic scrutiny. Differences in height are among those which often need to be verbalized, as they are charged with meanings. It is not enough for the analyst to be satisfied that he or she is the standard against which analysands can measure themselves. Analysis entails comparisons at its very heart. It involves, as Melanie Klein knew, both shame and envy. And envy and shame as basic feeling states have to do with the scales of relative size and discrepancies in perception.

As Wurmser (1987) points out, shame is

> caused by a discrepancy between expectancy and realization; an inner or an outer discrepancy, an inner or an outer conflict. It is the polarity, the tension between how I want to be seen and how I am. In its internalized version shame is thus the outcome of a very specific tension between the superego and the ego function of self-perception. The higher the self-expectation and the greater the demand for perfection . . . the greater the discrepancy, and the harsher the need for self-chastisement by self-ridicule, self-scorn and by symbolic or real disappearance and self-effacement. Insofar as "narcissism" refers to the concept of "self-esteem" and "pathological narcissism" to that of "overvaluation" of oneself or of others . . . any great discrepancy between self-expectancy ("ideal-self") and self-perception ("real-self") is by definition a "narcissistic conflict," and it is *eo ipso* one that is *felt* as shame . . . (p. 76).[5]



Psychic size can therefore symbolize feelings of shame as well as envy; size anxiety can also trigger defenses against shame and embarrassment about feeling wanting. Associated with the discrepancy between the way one fears one will be seen and the way one wants to appear, shame is often experienced as exposure, vulnerability, and consequently as fear of what we do not want others to see in us. Drawing upon discrepant images of oneself, shame over psychic size can evoke feelings of having been ostracized, betrayed, abandoned, since this is what one deserves if one's defectiveness becomes visible to others.

Derived from the Indo-European root *skam* or *skem*, meaning "to hide," our word "shame" relates to: 1) the (internal) experience of disgrace, together with fear that (perceived, external) others will see how we have dishonored ourselves; 2) the feeling that others are looking on with contempt and scorn at everything we do or don't do; and 3) a preventative attitude (I must hide or disappear in order not to be disgraced). Patients with narcissistic character disorders and those for whom shame is a particularly sensitive area are thus likely to be acutely sensitive to issues of size, comparison, and competition. They will attempt to "hide" their vulnerability by avoiding situations in which it might (either in fantasy or in reality) be detected by others. Applying this to body image and psychic size, we can feel large or small with respect both to our inner evaluations and to those we perceive and/or imagine others to judge us by.

To return to Gulliver fantasies, you will recall that the Lilliputians wished to put out Gulliver's eyes so that they would no longer feel he dwarfed them. Once blinded, he could not see what they did not wish him to perceive, and what they did not

[5] See also Wurmser's *The Mask of Shame* (1981). The affects described by Ferenczi and those of shame described by Wurmser are close to what Balint described in his book, *The Basic Fault* (1968).

wish to perceive in themselves. But Gulliver discovers that the Brobdingnagians, too, could be made to feel uncomfortable under his gaze, however small he is when compared to them.[6] While discussing politics, one of the ministers "observed how contemptible a thing was human grandeur, which could be mimicked by such diminutive insects as I" (p. 146). Contempt here is another facet of shame, and can be used defensively to attempt to control the intensity of shame feelings by reversal; it is not I who is ashamed but you, and you *should* be.

Shame is always and inevitably linked to body image, and body image to systems of judgment, both one's own and those of others. In the view of many analysts, human beings cannot form one complete image of the body. Consequently, "our bodily perceptions result in a multitude of different, independently established body images" (van der Velde, 1985, p. 527), all, as it were, vying for the unattainable status of completion. Because our own judgments—and those of others—intervene in our assessments of our bodies, whatever we call "body image" is necessarily at variance with experienced body feelings. This means that we use all our body images dialectically: to control the way we feel about ourselves and to control the way we perceive others feel about us. As van der Velde (1985) writes:

> Body images thus provide three social functions. They enable man to project how others see him by means of his appearances and actions; they enable him selectively to control the establishment and preservation of a desirable view of himself; and they enable him to create within others impressions that do not precisely reflect his actual self (p. 527).[7]

Shame draws upon discrepant images of oneself. Wishing to be as tall as a parent, for example, and feeling small, fearing that

[6] Jacobson (1964) makes the interesting suggestion that shame "refers to visual exposure, guilt predominantly to verbal demands, prohibitions and criticisms" (p. 144).

[7] What an "actual self" is and how it can be known are questions to which van der Velde has no ready answers.



the parent will see how small one feels, are part of the shame dynamics of children, who, especially in the United States, are constantly enjoined to "grow up." In the transference, shame over revealing to the analyst how small (or large) one feels touches on these dynamics. Body image is never created in isolation, but is reflexive, allowing us to imagine ourselves and others simultaneously in a process of never-ending comparison. All of our perceptions of bodies are of *relative* size. Therefore, they serve as a focus for competitive feelings, both conscious and unconscious.

To illustrate the uses of the concept of psychic size in analytic treatment, I will present several clinical vignettes, including dreams in which differences in size communicate feeling states.

The first dreams are those of a man in his late forties, small in stature. You will recall that I am tall (6′3″); this patient is short (roughly 5′6″). Throughout the analysis (and in the transference) he feels he has had to come up against "big powerful people" who sometimes represent his narcissistic, powerful, and famous father. In his struggles with such "powerful men" he feels that he has habitually come up short and has been humiliated, and that he will be even more humiliated if he lets on how humiliated he feels. A dream:

> I was standing in a railroad station. There were trains going past every which way. I had to cross over to another platform to get to my train. I only wanted to go a little way. Mine was a local train. The station was very large with lots of trains, express trains. There were so many trains going in and out. It was all very confusing. I felt some sense of urgency about getting my little train. Because the journey I wanted to make was a very small one I could not find my train. Just as I was about to get to my small train, this very fast train came in. It was not stopping at this station. It was enormous and going very fast. A very long train. It kept on going on as though it would never end. I was confused and frustrated at having to wait.

His associations led him to speak of having to wait for me

earlier in the week, of his confusion and frustration at having others (who seem larger, who have "larger" agendas) keep him waiting, and of the humiliation he feels if he lets anyone know how upset he is when kept waiting. He went on to express his anxieties that I would not have room for him in my agenda, since he was "too small," and that he could not let me know how much he resented my sense of my own importance, since that made him seem envious and feel lacking. Furthermore, he needed to be small so as to protect me and others from his rage. And he was angry at my treating him as though he were not as important as he felt he needed to be by keeping him waiting. Although he tried to scale down his ambitions, in fantasy his ambitions were very large indeed, so that with respect to them his achievements were forever being diminished.

The same patient commented that often in his dreams there is an atmosphere of a large, immense space with diminutive people huddled in groups in corners. Another dream:

> I am trying to cross a street. It is a busy street. I get down on my knees and am crossing the street when an enormous bus nearly runs into me. When I get to the other side, I stand up and look around. But nobody has noticed me at all.

A third dream expressed his feeling that he *has* to be small, since there is no room for him.

> I am in my parents' bed. My father is taking up a great deal of room, but my mother urges me to come next to her, where there is a small space. I go there, and then feel my father disapproving. I go outside and walk around for a while, and then return. This time my father is taking up more of the bed. There is no room at all for me. Thinking I have nowhere to go and that the dream has nowhere to go, I awake.

Feelings of smallness which come up repeatedly in the analytic material can thus be linked to actual size in the analytic situation: the patient feels me to be large and experiences his smallness by comparison to me. Furthermore, he experiences



the differences in size as a confirmation in fantasy of his feelings of insignificance, of having been and being continually overlooked and diminished. His struggles to assert his own importance run into oedipal obstacles, and he feels himself to be dangerous. To control his rage and feelings of being dangerous, he relies on others to "put him down," as in this last dream he feels that room for him in the bed is taken up by his father, and he has nowhere to go. Applying this to the dynamics of size and his size anxiety, it seems plausible that he "belittles" himself continually, both as an expression of helplessness and a wish to be helped, and as a defense against the rage against his father and other "large men" (like myself) who deprive him even of small spaces, who stand in his way and push him out. Not surprisingly, the ends of sessions were always very difficult for this man, as were all separations.

Consider also a clinical vignette and dream published by Hanna Segal (1991, p. 71). During a weekend break, the patient dreams: "He was with Mrs Small. She was in bed and he was either teaching or treating her. There was also a little girl (here he became rather evasive), well, maybe a young girl. She was very pleasant with him, maybe a little sexy. And then quite suddenly someone removed a food trolley and a big cello from the room." According to Segal, it was not the first part of the dream that frightened him but the second. After a very short (sic) consideration of associations, Segal concludes: "By changing me into Mrs Small, he had lost me as the internalized organ with deep resonance. The cello represented the mother with deep resonance, the mother who could contain the patient's projections and give a good resonance; with the loss of this organ there was an immediate concretization of the situation. On Saturday night, he belittled me, as is shown by his changing me into Mrs Small in his dream. This led to the loss of the cello ('one of the biggest instruments around')."

In this example Segal makes no mention of physical bodies (relative physical sizes). Instead she zeros in on the large cello as compensatory. It seems to me, however, that smallness and

largeness may have resonances in this patient's fantasies which need further exploration and analysis. Is there not a more complex situation here than Segal would lead us to believe, one which entails shame defenses against size anxiety? Is it not clear from the material presented that dreaming about the analyst as Mrs. Small (a "Kleinian") is indeed a scornful belittling? And even if it is, why should scornful belittling lead to dreaming of a large cello? Might the dream not be an attempt to reduce the analyst to the same psychic size as the patient, to make her equal in the eyes of one who himself feels small? If the patient experiences anxiety over differences in size between himself and Segal, how is such anxiety dealt with? The contrast small person/large instrument would seem to suggest phallic and other possible avenues of exploration which would go along with the sexual allusions in the dream. More often than seems to be recognized in the literature, anxiety over the size of breasts and/or penis is a form of size anxiety.[8] In sum, the interpersonal character of size anxiety and of psychic size appears to be missing from the interpretations provided, as do the unconscious fantasies about smallness and largeness and what these mean to the patient.

Finally, Ferenczi (see Dupont, 1988, p. 128) speaks about size anxiety in his discussion of a female patient who, in a dream, "saw ghosts of people, approaching her, as much larger than the people were in reality" (*ibid.*). Ferenczi related such magnification to "a simultaneous dilution of that person" (*ibid.*). The transformation of size in the dream suggests a lack of boundaries; the environment becomes so plastic that the contours of the person disappear. Then Ferenczi makes one of those observations which clinically is so astonishing, in part because there is nothing leading up to it or following from it. He links healthy narcissism with a stability in what I have termed psychic size.

[8] Castration anxiety can be related to size anxiety, particularly with respect to the size of penis, breasts, or any body part felt to represent them. For a recent review of the literature on castration anxiety, see Rangell (1991).



Conversely, he suggests that pathological narcissism may be related to an instability in psychic size.

> The narcissism that is indispensable as the basis of the personality, that is to say the recognition and assertion of one's own self as a genuinely existing, a valuable entity of a given size, shape and significance—is attainable only when the positive interest of the environment . . . guarantees the stability of that form of personality by means of external pressure, so to speak. Without such a counterpressure, let us say counterlove, the individual tends to explode, to dissolve itself in the universe, perhaps to die (pp. 128-129).

Applying these remarks to our notions of psychic size and size anxiety, it would appear that the experience of being a body of a given size, weight, shape, and significance, stable when compared to other bodies of different sizes, is an important index of psychic health and ego strength. Furthermore, these body experiences of stable psychic size are dependent upon stable object relations, upon the experience of significant others and internal objects whose existence and love can be relied upon as a sort of "counterlove" to keep the individual from exploding, to protect him or her from pathological narcissism, and to maintain the shape of experience.

In this paper I have sought to define and describe size anxiety and psychic size as fundamentally interpersonal; and to make some small contribution to the not inconsiderable subject of psychic size, size anxiety, and shame in the transference, in the analytic situation, and in all therapeutic encounters.

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*1887 Greenfield, #205*
*Los Angeles, CA 90025*

*Psychoanalytic Quarterly, LXIV, 1995*

# AN ARTIST'S DEFENSE AGAINST THE FEAR OF LOSS OF CREATIVITY TOWARD THE END OF LIFE

BY MILTON VIEDERMAN, M.D.

*A creative artist in his mid-sixties had a strong desire to own and carry with him a drawing by Picasso—a self-portrait done three days before his death. The drawing created a sense of calm in the patient, such as had never occurred before with the possession of an object. An apparent preoccupation with death might have obscured the primary concern of the artist, which was about the loss of creative power, and it was for this reason that he wanted to possess the drawing. The idea that this might be viewed as a transitional object at the end of life is discussed.*

A highly successful, sixty-five-year-old artist in dynamic psychotherapy came to a session one day from an auction exhibition where he had seen a drawing by Picasso, a self-portrait said to have been done just a few days before his death (Figure 1, p. 696). It was Picasso's last creative effort. Although the patient was advised by consultants that the price was high, he experienced a strong desire to own this drawing. "This is a magnificent work, the eyes are so lucid. Though they exude the fear that Picasso experienced with increasing deterioration and approaching death, there is tremendous power. I felt an extraordinary calm as I looked at this drawing. I must have it. I'll design a case to put it in so that I can carry it with me wherever I go. It makes me feel calm in a way that no other object has ever done.

I would like to express my appreciation to Ms. Susan Cartwright and Ms. Helen Bitterli for their help in arranging permission for the publication of the Picasso drawing.