Instructor’s Manual

PSYCHOTHERAPY WITH THE UNMOTIVATED PATIENT

with
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with Erving Polster, PhD

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Tips for Making the Best Use of the DVD

1. USE THE TRANSCRIPTS
Make notes in the video Transcript for future reference; the next time you show the video you will have them available. Highlight or notate key moments in the video to better facilitate discussion during the video and post-viewing.

2. SESSION-BY-SESSION DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
Pause the video after each session to elicit viewers’ observations and reactions. The Discussion Questions provide ideas about key aspects of the therapeutic work that can stimulate rich discussions and learning.

3. LET IT FLOW
Allow the sessions to play out so viewers can appreciate the work over time instead of stopping the video too often. It is best to watch the video in its entirety, since issues untouched in earlier parts often play out later. Encourage the viewers to voice their opinions; no therapy is perfect! What do viewers think works and does not work in the sessions? We learn as much from our mistakes as our successes and it is crucial for students and therapists to develop the ability to effectively critique this work as well as their own.

4. SUGGEST READINGS TO ENRICH VIDEO MATERIAL
Assign readings on working with unmotivated patients from Suggestions for Further Readings and Websites prior to viewing. You can also time the video to coincide with other course or training materials on related topics.

5. ASSIGN A REACTION PAPER
See suggestions in Reaction Paper section.

6. ROLE PLAY IDEAS
After watching the video, organize participants into groups of three. Assign each group to role-play a session with an unmotivated patient. Each role-play shall consist of one therapist, one client and one observer. After
the role-plays, have the groups come together to discuss their experiences. While role-playing the unmotivated client make sure that the client is not so oppositional that it becomes absurd; rather, allow the therapist to have some impact on the client’s motivation. First have the clients share their experiences, then the therapists, and then ask for the comments from the observers. Open up a general discussion on what was learned about both the practical and the emotional aspects of doing therapy with these clients.

Another alternative is to do all of this in front of the group with just the therapist and client; the entire group can observe before discussing the interaction. After a while, the facilitator or another participant may jump in as the therapist if the therapist reaches an impasse. Follow up with a discussion that explores what works and does not work with unmotivated patients.

7. PERSPECTIVE ON VIDEOS AND THE PERSONALITY OF THE THERAPIST

Psychotherapy portrayed in videos is less off-the-cuff than therapy in practice. Therapists or clients in videos may be nervous, putting their best foot forward or, conversely, trying to show mistakes and how to deal with them. Therapists may also move more quickly then is typical in everyday practice to demonstrate a technique. The personal styles of therapists are often as important as their techniques and theories. Thus, while we can certainly pick up ideas from master therapists, all participants must make the best use of relevant theory, technique and research that fits their own personal style and the needs of their clients.
Session-by-Session Group Discussion Questions

Professors, training directors or facilitators may use a few or all of these discussion questions keyed to certain sessions or those issues most relevant to the viewers.

SESSION ONE

1. **Engagement, Authenticity, and Confrontation:** Do you feel that Polster effectively engaged and confronted Gerald? Would this style feel authentic for you?

2. **Reaction to Client:** What was your initial reaction to this client? Did he seem unmotivated to you? If not, how would you characterize him differently?

SESSION TWO

3. **Use of Language:** How did you feel about Polster’s use of swear words with the client? Under what circumstances might you swear with, or at, a client?

4. **Humor:** When Gerald decided to signal his therapist when he was joking, did this push your buttons, or did you find it humorous? What are other ways to interpret or react to Gerald’s sarcasm?

SESSION EIGHT

5. **Leaving Early:** Would you have let Gerald leave early? How might you react to a client who states he wants to “leave right now?”

SESSION NINE

6. **Parts of the Self:** How do you react to Gerald’s two parts expressed in this session? What are your countertransference reactions to these parts, and how might you use these reactions in therapy?

7. **Appearance:** Would you have commented on Gerald’s improved appearance in this session? What might be the reason that Polster did not comment on it?
SESSION TWENTY

8. **Continued Reaction to Humor**: Do you feel comfortable with the way Polster reacts to Gerald’s humor? Could you imagine laughing out loud with Gerald in session? What might you do differently?

SESSION TWENTY-FOUR

9. **Confrontation**: What did you think of Polster’s statement, “I can’t trust you in your judgments”? If you were the client, how might you react to this kind of intervention?

SESSION FORTY-EIGHT

10. **Increased Emotional Intensity**: Did you agree with the way Polster kept pushing Gerald after he reacted negatively to the session? What are other ways to respond to Gerald’s resistance?

SESSION SIXTY

11. **Happiness is Not Everything**: Do you agree or disagree with Polster’s dismissal of happiness as a central goal?

12. **Vital Aspects of the Self**: Miriam Polster states, “All of us have characters within us that we have decided are useless, unattractive, or detrimental. To ignore them can be a form of amputation in which we may lose vital and unique aspects of ourselves.” What is your reaction to this quotation, and what does it imply for therapeutic work?

SESSION SEVENTY-TWO AND CLOSING REMARKS

13. **Termination**: What did you think of this termination process, including Polster’s recommendation to taper off? Did you think Gerald was ready to end treatment? Would you have suggested termination sooner, or would you have gone the other direction, and told Gerald that termination is not yet recommended?

14. **Personal Reaction**: How would you feel about being a client of Polster? Do you feel an alliance could be made, and that he would be effective with you?
Reaction Paper for Classrooms and Training

• **Assignment:** Complete this reaction paper and return it by the date noted by the professor or facilitator.

• **Suggestions for Viewers:** Take notes on these questions while viewing the video and complete the reaction paper afterwards or use the questions as a way to approach discussion. Respond to each question below.

• **Length and Style:** 2-4 pages double-spaced. Be brief and concise. Do NOT provide a full synopsis of the video. This is meant to be a brief reaction paper that you write soon after watching the video--we want your ideas and reactions.

**What to Write:** Respond to the following questions in your reaction paper:

1. **Key points:** What important points did you learn about working with unmotivated patients? For example, how is an alliance developed? What stands out in how the therapist works?

2. **What I am resistant to.** What issues/principles/strategies did you find yourself resisting, or what approaches made you feel uncomfortable? Did any techniques or interactions push your buttons? What interventions would you be least likely to apply in your work? Explore these questions.

3. **What I found most helpful.** What was most beneficial to you as a therapist about the model presented? What tools or perspectives did you find helpful and might you use in your own work?

4. **How I would do it differently.** What do you think you would have done differently than the therapist in the video? Be specific in what different approaches, strategies and techniques you might have applied.

5. **Other Questions/Reactions:** What questions or reactions did you have as you viewed the therapy in the video? Other comments, thoughts or feelings?
Suggestions for Further Readings, Websites and Videos

BOOKS


WEB RESOURCES
www.Psychotherapy.net An in-depth interview with Erving Polster

www.gestalt.org/postview.htm An Oral History of Gestalt Therapy
Part Three: A Conversation with Erving and Miriam Polster by Joe Wysong

www.sonoma.edu/users/d/daniels/gestalt.html Gestalt Therapy Resource Page from Sonoma State University
RELATED VIDEOS AVAILABLE AT WWW.PSYCHOTHERAPY.NET

Existential-Humanistic Psychotherapy in Action
– with James Bugental, PhD

Effective Psychotherapy with Men
– with Ron Levant, PhD

Gestalt Therapy with Children
– with Erving Polster, PhD

Irvin Yalom: Live Case Consultation

James Bugental: Live Case Consultation
Complete Transcript of Psychotherapy with the Unmotivated Patient

with Erving Polster, PhD

Erving Polster Commentary: Hello, I’m Erv Polster.

Miriam Polster Commentary: And I’m Miriam Polster. One of the fundamental principles of Gestalt therapy is that contact is the lifeblood of human growth. We’re going to see the therapy of a young man who doesn’t know how to manage the excitement of rich contact with his world. So he’s developed an attitude of critical detachment, perfectionistically judgmental about the people he knows and also about himself. Isolation allows him to maintain this position, that is until his sister, once again, pushes him into therapy. He is cynical about the process as he is about everything else, but underneath the cynicism one can almost feel the hope that this time he will be proved wrong.

Erving Polster Commentary: Three therapeutic orientations are the primary guides for this work. One is to engage Gerald pointedly each step of the way, hoping to spark him, and to demonstrate the attractions of lively and honest and perceptive interactions. The second is to transform his abstract and undifferentiated conclusions about the impossibilities of life into actual experience. The third is to restore within him his sense of a lively inner conflict so as to freshen up his deadened resignation.

Miriam Polster Commentary: It’s going to take a massive effort to pry him loose, but he responds to the challenge to engage with Erv, and to take a second look at the price he pays for mismanaging his natural excitement in familiar and resigned ways.
SESSION ONE

Polster: I had only the briefest talk with your sister who seemed very lovingly concerned about you.

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: And then briefly with you. And you seemed reluctant but willing to come.

Gerald: Yeah. I mean I guess we should talk about that right off the bat because I don’t know how you feel about dealing with someone who, I mean, I’m, it’s not entirely my idea to be here, and uh, [pause], I, I don’t even know, I’m not sure whether this is something that, uh, Suzanne is concerned and lovingly was the right word but…

Erving Polster Commentary: Gerald’s use of the word lovingly is an important sign, first because he picks up on words and uses it in his own remark, and second because he cares about the concept of being loving even though he seems disconnected from me in terms of our mutual purposes.

Gerald: I, I don’t have a lot of faith in therapy, I mean I’ve been around, she’s a therapist and I, you know, she’s two years older than me, so when she was in school and stuff I…

Polster: So you’re telling me apparently that though she has a high regard for me that you don’t have a high regard for the process, for the therapy itself, and you’ve been in it.

Gerald: I’ve been in it and uh, I’m, I’m not an idiot, you know, the whole thing about uh, insight leading to change unto itself is something that I’m not buying in a big way.

Polster: Well I don’t buy it either.

Gerald: Well that’s, that’s a good start right there.

Polster: Okay.

Erving Polster Commentary: I’m getting a strong message that obvious therapeutic procedures will alienate him. Instead I’ll try to stay in close contact with him, beginning to talk more like a savvy uncle than like a therapist. This will later involve meeting and matching him with sarcasm, humor, intensity, confrontation, and common sense.
Gerald: Yeah, I think a lot of people are really stupid and boring, and you know I don’t think I’m great but, um, you know, I know I’m no idiot and I just, whenever I, I don’t do well with my social interactions, terribly so, [pause], maybe I have fewer of them than she does.

Erving Polster Commentary: I’m going to temporarily make the assumption that Gerald is contact deprived. He acts but he doesn’t register his experience, and doesn’t feel the relationship.

Gerald: My office went virtual. Do you know what a virtual office is?

Polster: I have a virtual sense of it.

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: But maybe you could explain it a little more for me.

Gerald: It’s the concept of having an electronically connected office, as opposed to people in the same office space, and I do everything by computer. She just doesn’t see that without an office that I’m going to everyday, and little office get-togethers and things – it’s, there’s no difference, there’s no difference. I’ve, I’ve been this way for a very long time and it’s like, you know, call it what you will, call it anti-social.

Erving Polster Commentary: I think Gerald knows himself pretty well but I think he misunderstands his possibilities or has given up on his needs and desires.

Polster: So it’s really not any difference for you personally, is that what you’re saying?

Gerald: You know I, I, maybe I’m spending, I’m spending less time… I mean I haven’t, she said like “You haven’t left your house for 90 days”.

Polster: 90 days!?

Erving Polster Commentary: I don’t professionalize my surprise here because a technical response would turn Gerald off, possibly for good. Remember he is always testing me for authenticity.

Polster: What’s that like for you? I mean....

Gerald: It’s, it’s...

Polster: Is it okay? Or...
Gerald: Yeah, it’s fine.

Polster: It’s fine with you?

Gerald: I’m, I’m not pleased as punch but I’m uncomfortable around people and I, and I, I have everything I need. And I have a social life, it’s just, it’s kinda electronic that’s all.

Polster: Well how do you use it electronically?

Gerald: I have like a girlfriend in Toronto.

Polster: Oh really, I’d like to hear about her.

Gerald: Well she, here’s the thing, I don’t really know what she is and she really doesn’t know what I am, and I don’t even know if it’s a women, that’s the weird thing about, about having a social life that’s electronic.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: You know I…

Polster: Is that okay with you or, or what?

Gerald: My description says I’m 6 foot 2.

Polster: [laughs]

Erving Polster Commentary: This moment of humor gives me an entrée to raise an issue, which is probably central to most of his relationships.

Gerald: What is the satisfaction that we get from our social life anyway?

Polster: Well I don’t know, but what I’m wondering is, are you and I having any social life right now?

Gerald: Well I’m out of the house here, I mean…

Polster: Right, I know but…

Gerald: What’s the big deal?

Polster: I know but what I notice…

Gerald: It’s a big deal for Suzanne.

Polster: When I say something you pretty easily ride over it. I don’t have a feeling like it matters a lot to you what I say or I don’t say, it seems like you’ve pretty much got your mind made up and…
Gerald: Well I just, I just met you, I’m not that easy to get, I know what…

Polster: Listen, I just started, do you realize I just started to say something and you didn’t let me finish.

Gerald: Oh, I’m sorry.

Polster: You didn’t even let me start…

Gerald: I’m sorry.

Polster: No, no, now please, I’m not blaming you for it…

Gerald: No but it’s, it’s rude…

Polster: But I think it’s important to note it, to realize, something what may be missing. It’s as though you have to do it all by yourself.

Gerald: Huh, well I mean…

Erving Polster Commentary: Gerald is so isolated within himself that he can’t comprehend that someone else is coordinated with him.

Gerald: I know but uh…

Polster: You are sorry but…

Gerald: I feel also that this is therapy, I mean I should be telling you what, you know, it’s about me.

Polster: Well it is about you…

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: And I’m talking about you too.

Gerald: Okay.

Polster: And we have to find out what kinds of habits of mind influence you in what you see, what you don’t see, what you do, what you don’t do.

Gerald: Right.

Polster: Whether you’re up to date with yourself.

Gerald: Meaning what?

Polster: Well I mean like your reflexes may have been established a long time ago and may have nothing to do with what’s going on now.
Miriam Polster Commentary: This is a very interesting moment. Gerald says “This is therapy, we should be talking about me”. Erv responds by saying “This is therapy, we are discussing how to explore the nature of your experience”.

Gerald: I had, I had bad therapists as far as I’m concerned. I had knucklehead therapists.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: You know, and eh, when I talked to Suzanne about this actually, when I finally capitulated, basically...

Polster: Capitulated, yes.

Miriam Polster Commentary: Gerald’s use of the word “capitulation” is a deflection. It relieves him of responsibility for coming to therapy. Erv’s emphatic repetition of the word brings into Gerald’s awareness the disconnection between what he says and what he knows to be true. It also tells him that Erv is really listening.

Gerald: And they broke confidentiality.

Polster: Ah.

Gerald: That was really bad...

Polster: Mm, fantastic

Gerald: They told some stuff to my principal...

Polster: Uh huh.

Gerald: And I got into trouble for something I said in therapy.

Polster: Yeah. What did they do?

Gerald: I got in trouble the way an eleven year old gets in trouble: The principal called me in and threatened me, and said that he would suspend me next time. It’s not real trouble, I mean they don’t do anything to eleven year olds.

Polster: It’s a curious thing though: You tell me about this awful thing you had happen to you with this therapist.

Gerald: Mm.
Polster: And then you tell me it doesn’t matter. Now there’s a little bit of a contradiction there, you know, big trouble, doesn’t matter, that’s confusing.

Gerald: Did I say big trouble?

Polster: Well you said…

Gerald: Got me in trouble.

Polster: You didn’t say it in those words but you said you were treated very badly…

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: By two therapists, and I agree with you that this treatment was terrible.

Gerald: Terrible.

Polster: Terrible, now you’re saying terrible but then in the next moment I think you’ll say that they can’t do anything to you and it doesn’t really matter.

Gerald: Well no, understand my point here: It’s two separate issues. The fact that he went and told my principal was terrible, but as far as the being actually in trouble for smoking when you’re eleven, those are two different things. It’s, I, I think it was terrible…

Polster: You’re so…

Gerald: That he went and told somebody.

Polster: You’re so theoretical.

Gerald: I’m a very analytical person.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: That’s why I don’t believe insight leads to change. I have insight into myself.

Polster: Yeah, well I don’t know that you do but uh…

Gerald: Well I think I do.

Polster: Yeah, I know you think you do, but you think you know a lot of things that you may know only partially.
Erving Polster Commentary: I’m risking this confrontation because I don’t want Gerald to set the boundaries of what he can and can’t learn from our work together.

Gerald: I think that’s a mildly offensive statement.

Polster: Well I’m glad it’s mildly offensive…

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: I’m glad to have some effect on you.

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: So how is it to have received a mildly offensive statement? Did you mind? Did you, were you pleased? You looked…

Gerald: I was mildly offended.


Gerald: Well I was, I was amused by your comment that you got through to me. Yeah?

Polster: Yes, yes.

Gerald: I know I’m not big in, like, “affect boy”, I know I’m not really outgoing but I just, you know I…

Polster: Another concept about yourself.

Gerald: Yeah. Yeah.

Polster: Interesting?

Gerald: Do you think so?

Polster: Oh! Marvelously!

Gerald: Really?

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: I uh, I guess I’ve just, I’ve lived with me and I don’t find it that interesting.

Polster: Well, but that’s exactly the point.

Gerald: Right.

Polster: You’ve lived with yourself in this frame of mind…
Gerald: Right.

Polster: And you don’t find yourself interesting anymore. To me you look, unusually interesting.

Gerald: Unusually interesting.

Polster: Unusually interesting.

Gerald: In what way?

Polster: I feel like you’re being fresh with me, you’re being honest with me.

Erving Polster Commentary: Looking back I would rather have been more specific in order to focus Gerald’s awareness on what actually makes him interesting.

Polster: You’re a bit of a know-it-all, it’s true, but you’re quite honestly so.

Gerald: I must say I prefer a therapist who calls me a know-it-all and gives me some feedback. The other therapeutic experience that I had was, he just didn’t say anything.

Polster: Papp!

Gerald: Yeah, I just sat there and it was like…

Polster: It sort of confirms you’re point of view that people are not really very interesting.

Gerald: But at least you’re like telling me something.

Polster: Uh huh.

Gerald: I know I’m a know-it-all, I mean I know it.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: That I know too.

Polster: Yeah, terrific.

Gerald: You know, I haven’t quite committed to this whole therapy thing.

Polster: I know that.

Gerald: Yeah, I have some questions…

Polster: I’d be glad to…

Gerald: I mean…
Polster: Address them.

Gerald: I mean maybe it’s too early in this, in this meeting to, uh, ask.

Polster: It’s never too early to ask...

Gerald: Alright...

Polster: It may be too early for me to answer but...

Gerald: Alright, well my big question is like what the hell are you going to do with me? I mean, I’m not someone who you can just kind of give a little insightful statement and it’ll all click. I, I basically, I’ve been the way that I am for a very long time and I’m not going to change because, you know, I get something about my mother, or something like that. It’s not that simple. I don’t know, I feel that there’s not a lot that can be done.

Polster: Well now you’ve asked me a question.

Gerald: I, I know my...

Polster: Are you interested in the answer?

Gerald: Yes but I want to frame the question more specifically: What do you think is going to happen here? I guess is my question.

Polster: Well now what started out as a question tuned out into a, uh...

Gerald: Lecture.

Polster: A lecture, and a concept, and uh, a repetition of your opinions, and don’t you miss mine?

Gerald: [laughs] You think I’m a jerk?

Polster: [laughing] No I don’t think you’re a jerk. I think you’re very interesting, I told you that, but you’re not like every other person.

Gerald: No I’m not.

Polster: No you’re not.

Gerald: Uh uh.

Polster: It’s true. I’m glad for that.

Erving Polster Commentary: This is a key moment. My obvious pleasure introduces the idea that Gerald’s being different from other people does not have to isolate him from them.
**Polster:** My only problem is whether you’re so fixed into insisting on your own already developed point of view that you’re not willing to interweave our minds.

**Gerald:** I take it that you’re asking me if I, if I’m willing to put in the effort to try to absorb what you’re saying and uh, I would almost want to reverse that and say that well, you know, given that it’s not going to be very easy for me to do that, I, the, the will is there, and do you, do you think you can work with someone like me?

**Polster:** Oh you, you’re telling me the will is there, but you’re saying it’s very difficult.

**Gerald:** Maybe I should get back to an earlier point.

**Polster:** No, maybe you should allow me to say a word here and there.

**Gerald:** Okay, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.

**Polster:** It’s very important because what, what happens is that you’re mind is so entrained into where it’s already been…

**Gerald:** Right.

**Polster:** And to where you’re accustomed to going…

**Gerald:** Right.

**Polster:** That you don’t know how to absorb something that would be new for you and it might stir some new things in you…

**Gerald:** Right.

**Polster:** There’s no way I can encapsulate in a couple of sentences what we’re going to do, but I can tell you this: I can smell it in you…

**Gerald:** Yeah.

**Polster:** It’s going to be an interesting trip if you want to do it.

**Gerald:** Yeah, well I, I guess that’s what I want to get back to, is my preparedness, slash, will, and my, my own feelings, um, and I think I should give it a shot to get my sister off my ass, and also to try to get a more active life. I do want to… I’m 27 years old and I haven’t had sex in three years, okay. Let’s just call it straight. I’d like to go out, I’d like to get my life together a little bit more.
Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: There’s things that are like…

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: For real problems…

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: And I see, I see that there’s problems.

Polster: Yeah. Incredible! Cause you know part of what you’ve gotten into, it seems to me, is you’ve, you’ve forgotten how to want, and now you sound like you’re wanting something.

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: Yeah.

Erving Polster Commentary: My first impressions are that Gerald is nihilistic and depressed. He needs contact but he shuns it. He has told me that he won’t work with me if I use obvious therapy techniques and I believe him. But I will not allow him easily to escape contact with me. Everything I say will be as close to the truth, and as responsive to our interchange as I can make it. My hope is that through these experiences with me he will learn how to support the excitement of a genuine relationship and how to remain connected even in times of trouble.

SESSION TWO

Gerald: I have, eh, a sense that most things are vaguely boring, at least vaguely boring and mundane.

Polster: So you don’t really do anything that’s exceptional?

Gerald: No, I don’t do anything that’s exceptional. I write lame add copy. I do local stuff.

Polster: Yeah, well let’s, let’s see. What would it be that makes yours lame…

Gerald: It’s so easy.

Polster: And what would make it not lame?

Gerald: The expectations are not terribly high, you know? It’s, it’s all in
the southern California area. It’s not a big deal.

**Polster**: Well very little is a big deal.

**Gerald**: No, no. This session is boring me, actually.

**Polster**: Well, I was just thinking the same thing…

**Gerald**: Yeah.

**Polster**: That, uh, whereas our first session was truly illuminating to me…

**Gerald**: Mm, not for me.

**Polster**: And exciting for me. That’s such bullshit!

**Gerald**: Yeah.

**Polster**: Don’t bullshit me.

**Gerald**: No, I’m not bullshitting you.

**Erving Polster Commentary**: I don’t recommend this kind of provocative language but here I’m trying closely to resonate with his irreverence and rebellion. Also, I think earth tones are more likely to affect him. Gerald comes across to me not as fragile, just unwilling to join up.

**Gerald**: It wasn’t exciting.

**Polster**: Let me tell you something. You are keeping me out again…

**Gerald**: Right.

**Polster**: And I don’t think you want to keep me out. There’s something in you of the habit. So I have the choice between really staying with you on your channel…

**Gerald**: Right.

**Polster**: Which I’m willing to do as long as necessary…

**Gerald**: Right.

**Polster**: But you won’t allow it because you’re going to get so bored that you’ll find it useless…

**Gerald**: Yeah.

**Polster**: So there’s some contradiction in here; somehow or another you’re going to have to find something within you interesting enough, and
valid enough, so that we can have something new going on, not the same
cannels. You can’t do that right away.

**Miriam Polster Commentary:** Gerald views the world as a fixed gestalt. He is deeply invested in the perception of no change, willing to settle for boredom instead of risking engagement with an unpredictable world.

**Polster:** I uh, I would like to talk about uh, um, some particular thing that you get involved with or avoid and what you don’t like about it, who you don’t like, what you don’t like, what you disapprove of, not as a general idea.

**Erving Polster Commentary:** I asked Gerald to focus on a specific because his distorted concepts about himself and the world are unaffected by his experiences. The details, on the other hand, are markers of actuality, which would freshen up his life.

**Polster:** Can you think of anybody about whom you’ve had any critical thought?

**Gerald:** Yes I can.

**Polster:** Tell me one.

**Gerald:** Uh, my boss.

**Polster:** Yeah. I’d like you to tell me your criticism of your boss.

**Gerald:** Frank is a self-inflated, uh, he’s, uh, he’s, he didn’t start this company, he has a partner who died three years ago who was really the driving force and he drives a lovely Porsche, and he’s, I guess, um, in his early 60’s, and he, uh, he combs his hair over his bald head, and he’s a goofball and people respect him.

**Polster:** Okay. Now the one thing you said that is specific in what you criticize is the way he combs his hair.

**Gerald:** I think of that as representative of something else.

**Polster:** Yeah, but I’d like to know more things you disapprove of in him.

**Erving Polster Commentary:** Note how Gerald perceives his boss as a fixed image, almost a caricature.

**Polster:** What does he do? What does he say?
Gerald: He, he, he talks about his boat.

Polster: What does he say about his boat?

Erving Polster Commentary: I keep pushing him for details because I want him to experience the man as his boss not bosses.

Gerald: Like, women he takes out on it and…

Polster: So he takes women out on a boat, and does he say what he does with the women?

Gerald: I don’t think he needs to say what he does with the women.

Polster: But does he say?

Gerald: Um, he infers.

Polster: How does he, how does he infer?

Gerald: I mean there are certain things that are obvious, you just know.

Erving Polster Commentary: Gerald doesn’t understand what I’m driving at.

Gerald: It’s uh, it’s uh…

Polster: Is it something of a, a glance that he gives you or…?

Gerald: Maybe a glance…

Polster: A choice of language…

Gerald: Choice of language. He tries to impress, and in trying to impress he utterly fails to impress me. I think he’s a moron, and I don’t think he’s worked hard for anything that he has and yet he’s a respected…

Polster: Can you imagine, can you imagine what would happen if you were to say this to him?

Gerald: Yes I can.

Polster: Tell me.

Gerald: He would tell me to clear out my desk…

Polster: Yes.

Gerald: And to go across to the other side of the living room. He can’t quite make me leave the office because I, it’s my apartment. That’s a joke!
Polster: [laughs] Slow on the uptake.

Gerald: That’s okay.

Polster: Thanks for reminding me when something’s funny…

Gerald: I’ll point these things out to you…

Polster: Whenever there’s something funny…

Gerald: When I make a joke…

Polster: Yeah, okay.

Gerald: I’ll let you know

Polster: Fantastic!

Gerald: If I hold up my hand like this it’s a joke.

Polster: Sure, great.

Gerald: Um, he’s uh…

Polster: Okay, now wait a minute.

Gerald: Okay.

Polster: So obviously I don’t have to tell you, you’re telling me…

Gerald: Right.

Polster: That if you were, if you were to say the things that are really on your mind you’d be in big trouble.

Gerald: I’d be fired.

Polster: I understand but if your image of your powers are limited to the fact that you can’t tell your boss your point of view…

Gerald: Right.

Polster: That’s going to be very depressing.

Erving Polster Commentary: Gerald believes he has only two options: to voice his harshest criticisms or keep himself apart. I want to introduce the thought that this limited range contributes to his isolation.

Gerald: I don’t need to tell people what I think about them.

Polster: Yeah.
Gerald: I don’t feel that urge, cause even if it’s not my boss…

Polster: So, in, in other words, in a way what you’re saying, the way I take it…

Gerald: Right.

Polster: Is that you withdraw, in a sense, as an act of kindness.

Gerald: It is an act of kindness, if you like to put it that way.

Erving Polster Commentary: I see an entrée here into Gerald’s kindness. And if he can tune into this aspect of himself he will be better able to have contactful relationships.

Polster: I want to introduce the conflict within you. It’s as though you have no conflict inside, there’s only one side of you.

Gerald: Right.

Polster: I want to introduce the other side of you so that you’ll feel the conflict within, and restore the energy that a conflict creates.

Gerald: And what is that other side of me?

Polster: The other side is that you were telling me you would never say such things to certain people, it would hurt their feelings.

Gerald: Does that mean that I have utmost care for them, or does it…

Polster: Well it’s an act of…

Gerald: Just mean there’s no reason to?

Polster: It’s an act of kindness not to hurt somebody. Now, with your boss it’s an act of defeat.

Gerald: Well it’s an act of self-defense, I don’t want to be without a job…

Polster: But you’re…

Gerald: That’s all I need.

Polster: Self-defense but defeated.

Gerald: I don’t see it as def—, I don’t see it as defeat. I think of it as practicality, what am I going to do?

Polster: It is practical, I’m not discounting the practical.
Gerald: Right.

Polster: No, I think you’re right not to do that with your boss.

Gerald: Right.

Polster: I’m only telling you what I think that leaves you with. It leaves you defeated and then you conceptualize the whole thing as though the whole world is your boss, and you have to stay away from everybody, and you don’t have a sense of differentiation as to who you could be, what you need to be with, and who you can’t.

Erving Polster Commentary: Although Gerald continues to fend off what I say I believe that our engagement is getting so close that there will be a seepage of new possibility into his mind even though he cannot yet acknowledge it.

Gerald: And yet I hold so many in such a high degree of disdain that…

Polster: Take them one at a time.

Gerald: There’s five billion of them.

Polster: [laughs]

Gerald: Joke.

Polster: I’m laughing, I laughed even before…

Gerald: That’s good.

Polster: Before you raised your hand.

Gerald: Yeah, we’re working it. Yeah.

SESSION EIGHT

Erving Polster Commentary: Several weeks later Gerald’s sister came to stay with him during a marital crisis.

Gerald: You know, Suzanne went back to, uh, Steve…

Polster: Oh boy!

Gerald: And I just think she’s an idiot.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: You know.
Polster: An idiot is uh, not very delineated, I mean, you know…

Gerald: Well I’m not trying to be delineated per se, it’s just that she’s in a bad situation and she’s going back to this guy.

Polster: So she can’t, does she feel she can’t handle it, does she love him too much? Does she…

Gerald: I don’t know what…

Polster: Feel insecure without him? Does, does she need the trouble?

Gerald: Uh, she just needs the routine.

Polster: The routines.

Gerald: Yeah, that’s what I think.

Polster: Okay.

Gerald: She just…

Polster: Just the routines.

Gerald: She’s just going back cause he’s there. I have a feeling of resignation also, like what, you know. It’s not worth it to muster the energy to deal with these things, it’s just, I mean it’s just, it’s not my problem, I don’t know what to do about that…

Polster: It’s very disappointing to you, though.

Gerald: Yeah, it’s disappointing, it’s disappointing.

Polster: Yeah. [pause] It hurts too much.

Gerald: Yeah, I don’t know. [pause] It doesn’t hurt me, I mean it’s not my thing.

Polster: Yeah but I, perhaps I’m mistaken, but I was talking about you.

Gerald: Yeah, it doesn’t hurt me, it’s her, it’s her, it’s her, her problem, it’s her problem.

Polster: It’s possible for one thing to hurt more than one person.

Gerald: Well, I mean I had my sister around for eight days and… [pause] You know, I wasn’t living with her before and I’m not going to live with her again. I haven’t lived with her since we were, you know, 17.
Polster: Yes, but it was eight days at a whole new level, wasn’t it?

Gerald: No, it wasn’t eight days at a whole new level, it was eight days with breakfast, big deal! You know, it’s not that exciting.

Polster: I’m being romantic again, right?

Gerald: [sighs]

Polster: Do you remember what we talked about last week?

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: How each of us is romantic?

Gerald: Well, I don’t think that I quite, uh, acknowledge that, my own romanticism…

Polster: Well, you didn’t acknowledge it but then that’s customary, you don’t acknowledge a lot of things, but you’re…

Gerald: Well I don’t know if I agree with that. I mean, I don’t feel myself as like the romantic type. I don’t see that.

Polster: Well, no of course, that’s not the whole of you, and the romantic side of you is what you don’t like to see in yourself. But you’re speaking from the position of a romantic in relation to your sister – a disappointed romantic.

Gerald: How, how is that?

Polster: Well you want great things for your sister, you want a loving relationship for her, you want her to, to be in a…

Gerald: A romantic believes those things are possible…

Polster: What I’m saying is…

Gerald: The difference is that I don’t.

Polster: Yeah, you don’t like the romantic in you.

Gerald: I don’t expect… I’m not a romantic because I don’t expect those things. That’s an idealized fantasy that so many people buy into but it’s a crock. I mean, come on, give me a break.

Polster: I’m trying to understand your point of view about it.

Gerald: I’m in a bad way.
Polster: It’s, it’s hard for me because if I were in your position I would be disappointed, and I would also be angry.

Gerald: Angry about what? I mean…

Polster: I’d be angry about her, uh, making a farce out of returning. I’d be angry about him inducing her to return and treating her badly. I’d be disappointed about her not being in the household, as she was for eight days. Last week I felt, uh, a considerable love in you for your sister and now it seems like there’s nothing.

Gerald: I still, I still care for my sister.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: I still care for my sister.

Polster: That’s, that’s the part of it that I think is very important.

Gerald: I know but what kind of a moron does something like that, she’s just so off…

Polster: Her kind of moron, she’s a moron.

Gerald: She’s a moron!

Polster: So do you not love morons?

Gerald: I do not love morons. Correct.

Polster: Yeah, you don’t suffer…

Gerald: Good call.

Polster: You don’t suffer fools gladly, as they say.

Gerald: I don’t suffer fools at all. I stay inside.

Polster: Yeah. Even though you’re very disappointed, it seems to me, and back on the broken record way of talking…

Gerald: Uh huh.

Polster: I remember last week, I remember other weeks.

Gerald: Right.

Polster: You’re not only what you are now.

Gerald: I don’t even know what I am now, I’m just, I’m me, I’m, this is the
way I, this is the way I was born, you know, I mean, I uh, I just don’t like people very much and I, and they...

**Polster:** You were born not liking people?

**Gerald:** That’s right, and they just, and they never fail to uh, fulfill my expectations of their jerkiness.

**Polster:** What does it do for you to be right?

**Gerald:** [sighs]

**Erving Polster Commentary:** I’m treading a fine line here between strong contact and being offensive. It is my hope that if I err on the side of offensive, I’ve built up enough credit in my account with Gerald that he won’t give up on me.

**Gerald:** I want to go. I’m done. I want to go right now.

**Polster:** Would you hang on just a bit?

**Gerald:** I just, you know, I just, I just think I should just go. I, I think that we should call this a day.

**Polster:** I, I, I think you should have the freedom not to stay, but let me tell you that I think it’s very important that we be able to talk to each other through trouble, not by getting alienated during trouble. Like we are together through trouble.

**Gerald:** Well you’ve been talking about how there’s different sides of me, but this is the side that is there really, this is the black side underneath everything.

**Polster:** That is, that’s right…

**Gerald:** And I have no interest in anybody, including myself, right now and I don’t…

**Polster:** Gerald.

**Gerald:** I feel like, eh, this is all verbal masturbation, just talking about my difficulties with other people, and this and that and you know…

**Polster:** Gerald.

**Gerald:** Yeah.
Polster: Suppose I’m willing to be with you in your black side.

Erving Polster Commentary: Gerald sees trouble as a wall and does not understand how to work through it.

Gerald: Well, who else, who else would? I mean…

Polster: Who else needs to, I’m the only one here.

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: Can I live with you in your black side? Can you let me live with you in your black side?

Miriam Polster Commentary: His habitual pattern is to withdraw and be alone, certain that nobody could or would join him.

Gerald: Are we having fun?

Polster: Fun? Must this be fun? Must your black side be fun?

Gerald: No my black side must not be fun.

Polster: Yeah, it’s not fun.

Gerald: It is not fun.

Polster Commentary: This is at the heart of the matter. Gerald doesn’t believe anyone can tolerate his truly miserable black self. I will counter that by showing him that I want to stay with him and that I won’t crumble in the face of his anger and misery.

SESSION NINE

Gerald: I just feel like I, I kind of uh, owe you a, some sort of apology for uh… I was kind of a jerk last week and I, I, I mean I gave you the chance to let me go, but I mean, I was in a bad mood.

Polster: What you’re saying now seems to, uh, take account of me, and uh, I’m glad you’re doing that.

Gerald: Well I mean I’m not oblivious to other people. I just, I, I didn’t think it was, it was uh, it was fair, you know, that’s all.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: I mean, I gave you a very hard time last week.
**Polster:** [laughs] Yes.

**Gerald:** I know that.

**Miriam Polster Commentary:** Although this isn’t the first time Gerald has taken Erving to account, it is the first time he has acknowledged it and used that awareness in a feelingful interaction.

**Gerald:** I was feeling angry.

**Polster:** Sure you were.

**Gerald:** You know, and I, maybe not, I wasn’t really, um, comfortable or prepared to talk about it, when I was, kind of, feeling angry about it.

**Polster:** Yeah, well one of the ways of expressing anger is not to have any feeling at all and uh…

**Gerald:** Yeah.

**Polster:** Not to have any sense that anything is really important…

**Gerald:** Yeah.

**Polster:** That’s one way of expressing your anger.

**Gerald:** I had a meeting this week. I must say I, I was very uncomfortable.

**Polster:** Sure.

**Gerald:** But I, I mean, I uh, I never used to be visibly uncomfortable.

**Polster:** Oh.

**Erving Polster Commentary:** This is one of the first times that Gerald has talked about a problem as something that bothers him rather than a fatalistic, “that’s just the way things are”.

**Gerald:** But this time I didn’t feel like I could muster the, uh, the “Yes Bob, that’s a good idea”.

**Polster:** Yeah.

**Gerald:** That’s what I was having troubles with.

**Polster:** Yeah. This time you didn’t want to go through the motions.

**Gerald:** Couldn’t, couldn’t.

**Polster:** Couldn’t.
**Gerald:** Couldn’t. I, I’m not unable to go out and interact with humans…

**Polster:** Yeah.

**Gerald:** But now I feel like I’m becoming unable to do so.

**Polster:** Yeah.

**Gerald:** This was a bad thing. This was a disturbing thing that happened.

**Polster:** Well it is because it’s immobilizing.

**Gerald:** I mean I couldn’t do it…

**Polster:** Yeah

**Gerald:** I couldn’t do it.

**Polster:** But what I’d like to do, if you, if you, if you’re willing to…

**Gerald:** Yeah.

**Polster:** Is if we could limit your reactions to just right here in the room with me and without the sense of recommendation that you talk this way outside.

**Gerald:** Right.

**Polster:** I would like to see how many ways there would be to say what you thought to this man in the gradations from altogether authentic to phony.

**Erving Polster Commentary:** Gerald’s idea of integrity limits him to only one way of expressing himself. When this is impossible he gets stuck. I want him to experience the range of his possibilities so that he doesn’t paint himself into a corner.

**Gerald:** Okay. “Bob, I think that this is wrong on a couple of accounts. I don’t like the slogan. I think using a character is played, because if we came up with a better campaign in the first place, something even that was derivative of the sketches that we did, then, or even something completely different that was a better campaign, the give away would be moot. People would be interested in the product already”.

**Polster:** Yeah.

**Gerald:** Okay, I said that to Bob, right.

**Polster:** You said that to Bob, now what does he say?
Gerald: What’s his reaction? His reaction is…
Polster: Yeah.
Gerald: “This is my idea”.
Polster: Yeah.
Gerald: “I think it’s a damn good idea”. And the conversation he has with my boss, is something I don’t know what it is but I hear…
Polster: That’s what he says.
Gerald: So what have we proven?
Polster: Again, you’re taking me three steps ahead. You rush me all the time.
Gerald: Well maybe you need to move quicker, I don’t know what to tell you.

Erving Polster Commentary: This is a key theme with Gerald. He rushes me and himself, in fact all relationships. And when they don’t produce quickly enough for him he dismisses them.

Polster: So what you need…
Gerald: Mm.
Polster: And I hope you can get it one of these days…
Gerald: Yeah.
Polster: Is to become the boss.
Gerald: Yeah.
Polster: [points finger] Ah, psh!
Gerald: I’m sure I’d be a very satisfied and happy boss.
Polster: Fantastic.
Gerald: Sarcasm. I’ll hold up this hand for sarcasm okay? This will be a joke, this will be sarcasm. Ah, I would, I would ah, I would need to kill my employees on a regular basis if I was a boss. I couldn’t be a boss, I couldn’t.
Polster: You’re, you’re telling me that bosses are all beautiful souls, who never dominate anybody?
Gerald: No, I’m not telling you that, no.

Polster: So why couldn’t you be one of the pricks?

Gerald: Because it’s just not the way I want to deal, I mean…

Polster: Because you’re not a prick, you’re a good person.

Gerald: If you like.

Polster: I, it’s not whether I like, it’s what is, and what I’m experiencing now is again this conflict that I’ve talked with you about over and over again, that you don’t recognize conflicts within you…

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: There’s a conflict between the prick in you…

Gerald: Mm.

Polster: And the really dear sweet man.

Gerald: Alright, well let’s do this then. If there’s some dear sweet Charlie Brownish man living within me, some benevolent dwarf residing in my body, then I would like to know what your plan is to get him out because I still…

Polster: You’re rushing me.

Gerald: Don’t see the how.

Polster: Gerald, Gerald, look at me.

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: You’re rushing me.

Gerald: Mm. Alright, fine, I understand.

Miriam Polster Commentary: Note how much less rigid Gerald has become. When Erv challenges him, he takes it in, and is willing to improvise, instead of settling for stale behaviors.

Polster: One way is to talk about each in their real quality and I would suggest you tell me about these two sides of you. What are the manifestations in each, when are you one, when are you the other?

Gerald: It’s just, I don’t really see this benevolent loving side that you see.
Polster: What, what would you want to call it? You don’t have to use my words.

Gerald: I don’t see it. I don’t see it, the significance…

Polster: You don’t see anything in you that is soft, kind, uh compassionate for other people…

Gerald: Only that…

Polster: You’ve been compassionate with me here today.

Gerald: Only that I don’t want to [coughs] hurt other people for no reason. Is that a positive thing or is that just…

Polster: Just what? Wimpy?

Gerald: Just…

Polster: Or what?

Gerald: Just the default of, of, uh…

Polster: I have to fight…

Gerald: A personality default I mean.

Polster: I have to fight your nihilism too, right?

Gerald: Well all I can say is that I…

Polster: Nothing exists. Will you, listen…

Gerald: Okay.

Polster: You’re twisting me around, you said you’d go with this, and I’d like you to do it. You asked me how we would deal with these two sides of you…

Gerald: This is like, I apologized for last week and now you’re all the boss here.

Polster: Well, well… [laughs] Yeah I think since you’re the boss most of the time here, I, it’s only fair that I get a chance too.

Gerald: Alright, I’ll give you your minute.

Polster: Alright, so tell me when are you one side, when are you the other? Name it whatever you want.
Gerald: There are moments when I could hurt someone for no reason, where I choose not to. My point is this, is it kind not to run over a puppy in the road?

Polster: Well, what is it?

Gerald: It’s just applying your brakes so that you don’t run over a puppy.

Polster: So it has no character, it’s just a description of what you do.

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: It’s… Your willing to characterize once it—hey listen!

Gerald: I, I…

Polster: What am I going to do, debate with you? You’re, you’re, you’re going about this thwarting the original intent…

Erving Polster Commentary: What I’m doing here is taking him seriously, holding him to his expressed desire to know how we are going to bring his good side into the light of day.

Gerald: Cause I don’t see it. You’ve been doing this for whatever.

Polster: What do you have to see to go ahead with your agreement?

Gerald: I have to see the kind side. I don’t…

Erving Polster Commentary: There is a risk that he may feel dominated or defeated.

Polster: Then we have to deal with that.

Gerald: Okay, well that’s what we have to deal with because you make it seem like it’s something we can talk about, that it’s something real…

Polster: You’re telling me…

Gerald: And it’s not. I don’t see it.

Polster: Right. You’re telling me that you’ve never been kind.

Gerald: [pause] No, I won’t say that.

Polster: Well, what would you say?

Gerald: I would say that I’ve never put out effort to be kind.

Polster: Well, kindness does not require effort.
Gerald: Okay.

Polster: It might take effort but it doesn’t require it.

Gerald: Okay.

Polster: So I just want to know times when you’ve been kind, whether it was effortful or not.

Gerald: If there’s a big emergency I’m able to put aside my misanthropy…

Polster: I want to know one time. But you’re still going into generalities. You hide behind generalities.

Gerald: Okay, alright, alright.

Polster: I want to know some time when you’ve been kind.

Gerald: Alright, okay. Well…

Polster: Am I badgering the witness or something?

Gerald: You are badgering the witness. But that’s okay, that’s what I’m paying you for. There was a summer when I was in, uh, high school and uh, my mother’s shop was in really bad shape, cause she had financial problems. And uh, you know my friends were, uh, all hanging out at, at Martha’s Vineyard cause I had a friend that had some cash and his folks rented a summer place and everybody went up there for five or six weeks. And uh, I got a, a job instead.

Polster: Ah.

Gerald: It was an emergency.

Polster: To help your mother.

Gerald: It was someone close, it was an emergency, it was a kindness.

Polster: Yes, yes. Thank you for telling me.

Gerald: Thank you for asking.

Polster: [pause] What’s happening?

Gerald: Nothing. I just don’t, I just don’t see, uh, I’m skipping ahead, as you said.

Polster: You’re skipping, but you, this time you caught it.
Gerald: No, you asked me what was happening and…

Polster: But this time you caught it.

Gerald: And instead of sharing it…

Polster: You, you caught yourself going ahead. Don’t underestimate that.

Gerald: I was just, uh… Yeah, I was skipping ahead.

Polster: Yeah. What are you feeling?

Gerald: How does that make me feel? Uh, I, uh, not a lot, not a lot. The other day I thought that it would be nice to be able to uh, deal with people on another level.

Polster: Yes.

Gerald: But I uh, I think that’s some, somewhat of a new, a new kind of a thought. It would be nice to deal with people on another level.

Polster: Yes.

Gerald: But who could put up with me for three hours?

Polster: Well, I’ve never done it for three hours at a stretch but I’ve done it for about, well a number of stretches.

Gerald: You’re cute, but you’re not what I had in mind.

Polster: [laughs] Okay. I, I don’t even feel rejected.

Gerald: Okay.

Erving Polster Commentary: Gerald is now taking the events in his life more seriously, which allows him to replace abstractions with specifics. As he recognizes that he has at times been a good person, he then comes to feel worthy of wanting more in the way of relationships with others.

SESSION TWENTY

Polster: Well Gerald, what’s happening?

Gerald: Well, uh, I uh, I want to go out on a date. That’s my big announcement. But I’m not gonna, I don’t think.

Polster: Well, but you want to.

Gerald: I want to.
Polster: Yeah, okay.

Gerald: Is that a big breakthrough for you?

Polster: You fucker! [laughs]

Gerald: I’m not going to do it though because it’s just uh, I don’t know, I just, it doesn’t seem worth it. I met a woman.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: I didn’t really meet a woman. I met a figment. I met electronic signals. But she’s here in San Diego. So that raised the potential, for uh, some sort of, uh, date thing.

Polster: Uh huh. Well you communicated with her and…?

Gerald: I have.

Polster: And that worked, yeah?

Gerald: Yeah. And my optimism is just wild about it, I must say.

Polster: Is it the left hand or right hand?

Gerald: Sarcasm. I told her I was going out of town for three weeks. But I’m so clueless as to what to do.

Polster: Well, but you sound interested in what to do.

Gerald: Well again there’s that whole, like, lack of sex thing. It’s a mighty powerful motivation.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: I don’t even remember what sex is like. I don’t know what to do with a woman. Yet I, I don’t want to be a fool. I don’t want to be a fool.

Polster: I understand there’s more than one side…

Gerald: It’s not like I don’t want her to go out with a fool, that’s not my problem here.

Polster: The big problem is that it’s going to be a problem.

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: And there’s no way to do it without a problem.

Gerald: You’re saying I should, I should just get it over with, because some
day I should date again.

Polster: It sounds like you’re saying that to me.

Gerald: Well, I’m saying that to myself.

Polster: Yeah. Well I’m hearing it.

Gerald: Well that’s my, that’s my, uh, impetus.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: Take this scenario: So I pick her up, right?

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: So I say...

Polster: You’ve never met, you’ve never met her?

Gerald: No.

Polster: You know her address.

Gerald: Right.

Polster: You ring the bell.

Gerald: Right.

Polster: And then?

Gerald: What do we talk about?

Polster: Listen, we’ve been here together for quite a while now.

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: Five, six, seven months?

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: I don’t remember 20 seconds of silence between us.

Gerald: Yeah, but it’s not the same. I’ve been, I’ve always been very uncomfortable with women. I’ve never done well with the ladies.

Polster: Oh, you mean you’re comfortable with me?

Gerald: No, but uh...

Polster: I almost caught you...
Gerald: Well, at this point…

Polster: I almost caught you in being comfortable with me.

Gerald: Uh, at this point I’m not that uncomfortable, I mean…

Polster: So it’s a development, I mean you’re, you’re no longer uncomfortable with me.

Gerald: But this is a, this is a dating, this is a different…

Polster: I understand…

Gerald: Scenario.

Polster: I understand that it’s different but…

Gerald: But let me just say that this is always what you want me to do. You’re generalising…

Polster: I didn’t…

Gerald: And I’m talking specifics.

Polster: I didn’t…

Gerald: It’s not like all interactions are the same. This is a date.

Polster: Yeah, but I…

Gerald: Let’s try to be specific about the date.

Polster: Terrific!

Gerald: Okay.

Polster: Okay, there you are…

Gerald: So I can interact with you and not be able to interact with her, be a total moron when she comes in.

Polster: Of course, well said. You called me on what I said beautifully.

Gerald: Okay.

Polster: You’re not doing this all alone.

Gerald: Okay.

Polster: I’m assuming that if you’re gonna pick her up, she’s gonna be with you.
Gerald: Yeah, Yeah, that’s the difference between the sex life I’ve been leading.

Polster: Yeah, where you had to do it all by yourself.

Gerald: Right.

Polster: [laughs]

Gerald: Okay, so I pick her up and I say hello, and then…

Polster: Yeah, and then what does she say?

Gerald: She says hello.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: The problem that I’m most fearful of, is this thing that used to happen to me when I did go on dates…

Polster: Ah!

Gerald: Occasionally.

Polster: Let us talk about those experiences.

Gerald: Okay, alright, okay.

Polster: Fantastic!

Gerald: And this was, this was very, very easy. It was this dynamic that happened, that it was like if I wasn’t interested in the person I was going out with it was like writing ad copy. I could just sell myself. I’ve figured out what buttons needed to be pushed, and I would. And that’s very manipulative, and not right, anyway. If I was interested my mind would just go blank.

Polster: Ah, fine, I see, so in other words…

Gerald: And I would have nothing to say…

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: And I could not be witty or charming or anything…

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: Or do anything.

Polster: Yeah. Can you remember anyone with whom you were like that?
Gerald: Yes.

Polster: Tell me about her.

Gerald: Oof! Oh this is a bad situation. I was just so uncomfortable, and uh, I really liked her, and uh, I was just so self-conscious, it was really, it was horrible [puts his hands over his face].

Polster: Yeah, how old were you?

Gerald: I was probably 18 or 19.

Polster: Mm, and what was she like?

Gerald: She was uh, very, very hip.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: And very sexy.

Polster: Uh huh. And you felt, how in relation to her?

Gerald: Uh, It felt like it was incumbent upon me to try to impress her. I failed miserably.

Polster: How did you, what did you do that failed?

Gerald: I, I don’t know, I was just goofy. Goofy, I just ended up being goofy.

Polster: Goofy, meaning like making funny jokes, or out of…?

Gerald: Not funny jokes, no.

Polster: No they weren’t funny. Trying to make funny jokes.

Gerald: Like trying too hard.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: Trying too hard. And then she invited me up to her place, which I thought was a good sign. And uh, you know, I uh, it seemed like a good sign. I tried to make a pass at her. Oh I don’t know, one thing happened or another and she, she was like tired, so she said no. She bade me farewell, invited me to depart, which I did. And this is, and this is something that, that I also felt really worried about because I didn’t stop outside of her door to eavesdrop. I like, I had to tie my shoes. I just bend over and tie my shoes, and she’s really loud, and she’s like “What a geek!”. It was like all the
things that I was afraid of, she’s talking to her roommate and she’s like “I like him but I just don’t find him at all attractive cause he’s so geeky!” Nice guy, but who cares?

**Polster:** So, I assume you felt humiliated by that?

**Gerald:** That’s a good word.

**Polster:** Uh huh.

**Gerald:** Yeah, also angry.

**Polster:** Yeah.

**Erving Polster Commentary:** This was a key story and Gerald was able to tell me the details of an actual trauma, rather than generalities about the misery of life itself. We’re continuing to uncover the pain from which his isolation evolves.

**SESSION TWENTY-FOUR**

**Gerald:** Pfff! I had my fun date.

**Polster:** Yeah.

**Gerald:** It was as expected.

**Polster:** Of course, of course.

**Gerald:** Bad.

**Polster:** Yeah. What happened?

**Gerald:** Um, she said that I was dishevelled.

**Polster:** Dishevelled?

**Gerald:** Yeah.

**Polster:** And were you?

**Gerald:** I don’t know.

**Polster:** Uh huh.

**Gerald:** I think it was bad enough that she thought I was dishevelled.

**Polster:** Uh huh. So then what?

**Gerald:** She said many other things but that’s what I fixated on.
Dishevelled.

**Polster:** Well, but isn’t that what we’re trying to contend with, that somehow or another you pick one thing out…

**Gerald:** Yeah, Yeah.

**Polster:** And make it the whole thing and maybe that’s… maybe that represents everything for all I know, but it’s not certain that it does, so I’d like to know what else happened.

**Gerald:** She was very, very bright, and it sucked, it went really badly.

**Polster:** Well, could you…

**Gerald:** It was exactly as I prognosed that it would.

**Polster:** I mean, I understand that it sucked but that doesn’t tell me…

**Gerald:** I was, I was not at all smooth. I just wasn’t smooth. I didn’t have, um, funny things to say or uh, intelligent banter to throw that way, and uh… So we did this whole thing and, uh, and I liked her, and I asked her if she wanted to go out again, and she said no.

**Polster:** Huh. Wow.

**Gerald:** Now, on the other hand I’m not nearly as miserable about it as I thought I would be.

**Polster:** Yes. First of all, I really would like to know a little more about what went on, rather than just a grade.

**Gerald:** Okay.

**Polster:** Was it an F grade or an A grade…

**Gerald:** Okay. I got there. I sat down, um, I waited a while, she was 15 minutes late, 10 or 15…

**Polster:** She was 15 minutes late!

**Gerald:** Which didn’t bother me, and uh, it was actually somewhat amusing because I didn’t know what she looked like and, and a number of women walked in and I, I kept, kind of, wondering if that was the one and uh, and then she came over and sat by the table, and I…

**Polster:** Well how did you know each other, uh, visually?
Gerald: I had told her what I was going to be wearing…

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: And uh, described myself.

Polster: But you didn’t tell her you were going to be disheveled.

Gerald: I didn’t mention that. I failed to mention my disheveled state, yes...

Polster: Yes.

Gerald: In advance. I was, I was extraordinarily self-conscious.

Polster: Uh huh. Well there’s always…

Gerald: To the point where I was thinking about where my hand was…

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: Whether my hands should be here, or there…

Polster: Yes.

Gerald: Or here…

Polster: Yeah, which is…

Gerald: Or like that.

Polster: Which is incredibly distracting, isn’t it?

Gerald: Yes. I was concentrating on me the whole time.

Polster: Yeah, it’s sort of…

Gerald: And I had this internal dialogue going on where I was saying “Okay, now say something intelligent”.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: And then I said back to myself “Sorry, I have nothing to say”.

Polster: Well the key word there is intelligent…

Gerald: Yes.

Polster: Which involves, uh, continual—as we’ve seen before over and over again—continual judgment, continual grading of whether it’s good enough or not good enough.
Gerald: Well, I didn’t want to make banal chatter. I mean, I uh, I did, I wanted to say something witty.

Polster: Yes. I understand.

Gerald: We talked about computers.

Polster: Uh huh, that’s a nice beginning.

Gerald: It, it really wasn’t.

Polster: Well, I mean considering that your relationship was with computers.

Gerald: Yea, so we talked about the only thing that we seemed to have, I mean…

Polster: That figures.

Gerald: Yeah, but it was really very, it was, it was extremely, uh dull.

Polster: Can you tell me more clearly how it ended, I mean, I’m sure that the two of you didn’t just get up and leave, right?

Gerald: No. I asked her if she wanted to go out on Friday, and she said she was busy on Friday. I think in the end we had loosened up a little bit, it was a little bit better.

Polster: So she’s busy on Friday and you took that as a no.

Gerald: No, I took her attitude as a no. I took her no as a no.

Polster: Of course because you conceptualize everything…

Gerald: It was a no.

Polster: Nothing is as it is.

Gerald: It was a clear no.

Polster: It was a no for Friday.

Gerald: Uh, no, her attitude was no. No, not ever.

Polster: You know there are body language things…

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: And one doesn’t have to hear “I won’t ever go out with you again” to believe the person will never go out with you.
Gerald: Right.
Polster: I can understand that.
Gerald: It’s true.
Polster: But can you understand I can’t trust you in your judgments because of the way you make your judgments? I have no way to know if there’s any real truth in what you’re saying or not because you’re so characteristically the same no matter what the circumstances, and you are with me even. I, I can’t trust you to be making the judgment that fits your perceptions.
Gerald: Well then you’re going to have to call her.
Polster: [laughs] What’s her number?

Miriam Polster Commentary: This was a real step for Gerald. He fully experienced a disappointment but did not feel compelled to turn it into a tragedy. The interaction between Gerald and Erv in this session seemed almost comradely, their banter touched on serious topics without Gerald getting bogged down in his customary gloom.

SESSION FORTY-EIGHT
Polster: There are so many ways in which I have found you impressive which you would uh, simply dismiss.
Gerald: Like what?
Polster: Your humor is very uh, sharp and quick. Your uh, your language sometimes is very metaphorical and very colorful.

Erving Polster Commentary: This may be the first time that Gerald has taken in, and accepted, a recognition by me of his positive qualities.
Gerald: I understand what you’re saying.
Polster: Fantastic! That’s a big step
Gerald: But what do I do about it? I mean what do I do about it?
Polster: Not so quick!
Gerald: Insight doesn’t lead to change.
Polster: Not so quick.
Gerald: We’ve already decided that.

Polster: Let’s take a moment for feeling what I just said to you.

Gerald: Right. I don’t take compliments well. I don’t like compliments. I don’t like to be complimented. Why do you think that is?

Polster: Now, the reason I think it is, is because, maybe you’re not going to like this but I’m going to tell you the answer to your question anyway. The reason it’s so difficult is there is uh, there is an internal sensation of expansion that you dread. You don’t know what to do with it. You get so big inside. You, you wouldn’t know whether to cry, or scream, or make strange noises, or have an orgasm. There’s so much inside of you and it’s as though you don’t have enough room for it, and you don’t know what it takes to release all that excess of energy.

Gerald: I think these sessions are getting more intense.

Polster: Uh huh, maybe you’re feeling them more.

Erving Polster Commentary: Even though Gerald is more engaged with me, he still feels that as he was so will he always be, not recognizing that he has changed and it is his experience of the sessions, which has become more intense.

Polster: The big problem is the gap between feeling something and knowing what to do about it. It’s as though that is an insurmountable gap for you. If you don’t know how to do it, you don’t want to feel it.

Gerald: Well, I don’t want to just be left in a place where I’m unhappy.

Polster: Of course, exactly, to be left in this state of excess inside and no way out.

Gerald: But I feel like I’ve nothing inside.

Polster: Well, what I’m telling you is I think you have too much inside.

Gerald: What do you want me to do, Erv?

Polster: I want you to…

Gerald: Do you want me to break out and cry and do a whole emotional thing here? I mean, it’s not me, it’s just, it’s not me.

Polster: That’s not what I’m asking for, although that would be probably
fitting. There’s something about making a demand that everything you say to me result in your cure...

**Gerald:** Yeah.

**Polster:** That dismisses everything we do.

**Gerald:** Yeah, Yeah, I understand. I, I see what you’re saying, I just don’t know how to stop myself from doing that.

**Polster:** Alright, you want me to make some suggestions?

**Gerald:** And the bottom line is that it’s not a new thing for me, this is not a new tendency that I have so…

**Polster:** Right.

**Gerald:** I’m looking for uh, I’m looking for some answer to that question, you know. I mean, it’s not the what. It’s the how.

**Polster:** Well, are you asking me seriously a question?

**Gerald:** Yes I’m asking you seriously.

**Polster:** And you want an answer? Okay, I’ll give you, I’ll give you some suggestions. Let’s play around with this. I’d like you to make up three sentences beginning with the word “Yes”.

**Gerald:** Yes?

**Polster:** Yes, comma.

**Gerald:** Yes, comma. Care to name a topic?

**Polster:** No, just whatever comes to your mind, it doesn’t have to make sense, it doesn’t have to be true, just sentences.

**Gerald:** Yes, I saw the, I saw the bird fly through the window.

**Polster:** That’s one.

**Gerald:** Okay. Yes, I would like some fudge on my ice cream, thank you very much.

**Polster:** Two.

**Gerald:** Yes, I think that these exercises are silly.

**Polster:** [laughs] That was a tricky one.
**Gerald:** Now, what did we just accomplish? Nothing, anything, something?

**Polster:** You got me.

**Gerald:** Got ya.

**Polster:** Defeated. You win.

**Gerald:** It’s not a competition. I don’t want to win. I want to understand what’s going on here.

**Erving Polster Commentary:** I want Gerald to experiment with affirmation, an abandoned counter-point to his automatic “No,” which is the core of his nihilism.

**Polster:** I don’t believe you. You’re tricking me and you’re lying to me.

**Gerald:** What are you talking about?

**Polster:** I’m talking about denying what you think, and I’m talking about denying what you know.

**Erving Polster Commentary:** Frustrated with Gerald’s sham and at a loss for the right words to express that feeling, I called it lying. I would rather have addressed how often we had been through this game of playing dumb and how ill it has served him.

**Polster:** Tell me what you know about what’s going on now.

**Gerald:** What I know about what, what’s going on now. I know, uh, I know that I am extremely uncomfortable right now.

**Polster:** Yes.

**Gerald:** And I know that this session sucks!

**Polster:** Yes.

**Erving Polster Commentary:** I am confirming Gerald vigorously because I think, perhaps incorrectly, that he is pretending ignorance, which deprives him of a sense of volition. Though I knew that this was a bold move and risky, I felt I must face him with his responsibility for his words.

**Polster:** When I told you I thought you were lying, I think I have to explain what I mean. You know something and you don’t know
everything. You’re so in the habit of saying you know nothing, that you’ll rather lie and say you know nothing than to say what you know.

Gerald: Who comes to a therapist and lies to them? Who does that?

Polster: Most people. I never saw a patient who didn’t lie to me. Have you ever lied?

Gerald: Have I ever lied? In my life or in therapy?

Polster: Yes, in your life.

Gerald: I don’t know, I, I mean, uh, don’t we all lie at one…

Polster: Yes.

Gerald: Time or another?

Polster: Yes we do.

Gerald: Okay.

Polster: Yes we do.

Gerald: So, I have too, I have too.

Polster: I’m not asking for a sin, I’m asking for a lie.

Gerald: One particular lie?

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: Suzanne always wants me to go out, she wants to get me out of the house.

Polster: Yes.

Gerald: And I tell her that I’m unable. I’m unable.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: That’s a lie, that’s a lie.

Polster: It’s a lie.

Gerald: It’s a lie.

Polster: You say to her that you’re unable.

Gerald: Yes.

Polster: And that’s a lie.
Gerald: Yes.

Polster: Hallelujah!

Gerald: Well this is making you happy, but I’m not happy. I don’t know what’s going on here.

Polster: I’m not expecting you to be happy by being caught in a lie, what I’m expecting is that you will understand that you can get caught up in lying, and begin to think it’s the truth.

Gerald: I’ve never thought I was unable.

Polster: Well you could have fooled me! And you apparently fooled your sister who thought you thought you were unable.

Gerald: Uh huh.

Polster: Okay, so there is some sense in what I’m saying.

Gerald: Yeah, there’s some sense in what you’re saying.

Polster: Some sense, Yeah?

Gerald: There’s some sense in what you’re saying.

Polster: Okay, terrific. That’s all I ask, just the truth. [pause] You okay?

Gerald: Yeah, I’m okay. I didn’t like this session.

Polster: Yeah. It still might have been an important session, even if you didn’t like it.

Erving Polster Commentary: Several weeks later Gerald did see the woman he had met on-line again. Although he dismissed their date with the comment that there was no spark, the experience opened up the possibility that there might be people out there for him.

SESSION SIXTY

Gerald: I went to a, uh, party this week.

Polster: Pshooooo!

Gerald: What do you think about that?

Polster: I say “Pshoooo!”

Gerald: Pshooooo!
Erving Polster Commentary: This non-verbal affirmation is a simple and human recognition of achievement. I think the humanizing of therapy is important for most people, but especially so for Gerald.

Gerald: I’m going to become a party boy.

Polster: Don’t make me sorry about your progress.

Gerald: Yeah. It was kind of, it was kind of an interesting experience.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: I went to my usual corner. And generally at parties, I’ll hit a corner. I was talking to this girl, and uh, maybe I wasn’t doing that well, which was okay, I was alright with that. And then she was talking to this guy afterwards, and I started to kind of think, like, what a dork, like what’s, what’s her problem, type thing.

Polster: Like her problem?

Gerald: Her problem.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: Yeah. And I just thought about a lot of the things you’ve been saying, you know, about having kind of contradictory cues going on, and I was struck by this urge of mine to put down this whole situation as uh, as just being the stupidity of people in general. I had that old feeling that, as if I was back in school, and everything was, you know, the normal kids and the weird boy.

Polster: Yeah. So in other words you’re calling her a dork, but you also know what it’s like to...

Gerald: To be on the outside.

Polster: To be thought of as a dork.

Gerald: That’s right.

Polster: Yes, fantastic.

Gerald: That’s what I’m talking about.

Polster: But, but there’s a dork side of you, right?

Gerald: Um, okay, sure I’m a dork.
Polster: Yes, okay so if I say…

Gerald: I’ll revel in it.

Polster: I didn’t say you were a dork.

Gerald: No.

Polster: That’s the mistake you make.

Gerald: Right.

Miriam Polster Commentary: All of us have characters within us that we have decided are useless, unattractive, or detrimental. To ignore them can be a form of amputation in which we may lose vital and unique aspects of ourselves. We need to reclaim and acknowledge these unwanted characters to enlarge our vitality and versatility.

Gerald: I understand what you’re getting at, I mean, I understand your point here.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: My feeling is that the gap that I have now is that I don’t understand really in a practical way how to, how to make that unison. If I get my dork and my hip guy into a pool we’re going to be drowning like that.

Polster: Yeah, okay, that’s the way it is now. So I’d like to get to know both of these guys, and I would hope you would want to know them also.

Gerald: But I don’t want to be a dork, Polster.

Polster: Well, let’s first of all see what the dork is like, whether you conclude that you don’t want to be the dork.

Gerald: He’s scared of people.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: He’s insecure and he’s afraid of himself. Who wants to be that, who wants to be the dork? I’m sure I don’t want to be the dork. You know what I’m saying?

Polster: Oh, I know what you’re saying.

Gerald: Okay.
Polster: What if the dork and the hipster got together. How would the dork take what the hipster offers? What could the hipster contribute to the dork?

Gerald: Uh, a goodly beating. In other words I don’t want that dork in me.

Polster: Well, wait, who’s talking now? This is not the hipster talking; this is someone above them both.

Gerald: Right.

Polster: Who is that?

Gerald: That’s me.

Polster: That’s you.

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: Okay, let’s see what the hipster would say about whether he has any contribution to make to the dork.

Gerald: I don’t think I’m comfortable with this hip thing, I’m not, I’m not a hip guy, I mean I...

Erving Polster Commentary: Although he considers the possibility of the hip self, Gerald still has trouble tolerating the excitement of this idea. Positive thoughts about himself and the idea of his inner complexity do not sit easily within his mind.

Gerald: No, I don’t.

Polster: Oh you don’t know the hip guy either, so, alright you said you didn’t want to deal with the dork, cause you don’t like to be a dork, so tell me something about the hip guy in you.

Gerald: I just don’t know if I have a hip guy in me, I mean I, now that we’ve, now that we’ve quantified it like that, I don’t feel, uh, very comfortable with that description.

Polster: You’re the horse that’s led to the water and doesn’t want to drink, right?

Gerald: Maybe we need to discuss the horse within me.

Polster: That’s right!
Gerald: Okay.

Polster: Now you got it. I’m willing.

Gerald: I’m really not sure just who I am, I mean when it comes right down to it you ask me who that is that’s above the dork, or hipster, or whatever you want to call it, but I, I don’t know who that is, I don’t know who I am, what’s, what’s the over-riding I?

Polster: Who the real you is.

Gerald: Who is my real me?

Polster: We are not made that way.

Gerald: So we are condemned to being conflicted.

Polster: There are different kinds of conflict. You behave as though…

Gerald: Well, interpersonal conflict…

Polster: They’re all the same.

Gerald: Or an argument at the supermarket, I mean…

Polster: We’re having a conflict right now, right? What’s the matter with it? I’m enjoying it. Well, you don’t seem to be in trouble about it. You conflict with me all the time, it’s like your way of life.

Gerald: Everyone needs a hobby.

Polster: Now I think the conflict you and I are having is fun. It’s a vigorous conversation. See?

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: But if you were to have this conflict with someone on the outside…

Gerald: Right.

Polster: It’d be the end of the game.

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: Well how do you live a life, how do you relate to that world outside there, by eliminating what we’re doing? So there are two sides to the point, one is other, your conflict with other people, and the other is where we started out with, with the conflict inside, like between the dork and the
hip person.

**Gerald:** Right.

**Polster:** And then the whole issue, who is this who’s saying to the dork and the hip person, “You’re not good enough”.

**Gerald:** Right, right.

**Polster:** What would the dork and the hipster say to each other?

**Gerald:** I don’t know what they’d say but I know they wouldn’t like each other.

**Polster:** Well how would they express that?

**Gerald:** I don’t know.

**Polster:** Well let’s imagine it.

**Gerald:** Well I know that the, the, the, uh, uh, the more uh, witty one of those two would, would make fun of the dork.

**Polster:** Okay, well let’s be, be the hipster, what would he say to the dork?

**Gerald:** He’d say “What a geek!”

**Polster:** Yes, okay, that’s what you say to the dork, now what does the dork say in response?

**Gerald:** I don’t know how the dork would defend himself. I, I don’t know.

**Polster:** Yeah, but I’m not asking you to know, I’m asking you to imagine.

**Gerald:** I, I, he’s too dorky to do so, he’s afraid of the hipster.

**Polster:** No you’re dorky, you’re the one I’m asking to imagine. The dork is not… I’m asking you to imagine what the dork would say in response.

**Gerald:** “You’re right”.

**Polster:** Fantastic! So the dork says to the hipster “You’re right, I’m a geek”.

**Gerald:** Right.

**Polster:** And what does the, uh, hipster say now?

**Gerald:** “Get away from me, you bother me”.

**Polster:** Uh huh, and what does the dork say?
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Gerald: “Okay”…

Polster: Uh huh.

Gerald: “Please don’t hurt me”.

Polster: Uh huh, and what’s it like for you as the dork to say that?

Gerald: Uh, I, I’m not the dork. I don’t want to…

Polster: No, as the dork.

Gerald: I don’t want to be the dork.

Polster: Oh, you don’t even want to play the dork.

Gerald: I don’t even want to play the dork.

Polster: So this is a struggle within you, not between you and me.

Gerald: Right.

Polster: Uh huh.

Gerald: Right.

Polster: Yeah, so in a sense what’s happening is that you’re feeling some conflict within rather than only with me, or only with the world at large.

Gerald: I feel, I feel some conflict within, yes.

Polster: Yes. Fantastic!

Gerald: Well I’m glad you’re pleased. It’s not something that makes me happy.

Polster: Well, I know it doesn’t make you happy but it makes you you. It doesn’t make you nothing. You think happiness is everything?

Gerald: I think it’s something.

Polster: Oh, it is something.

Gerald: Yeah.

Polster: It is something; it’s a lot.

Gerald: It’s something that I want to have, that I don’t have.

Polster: I’m glad…

Gerald: That I haven’t had for a long time.
Polster: I am glad to hear that.

Erving Polster Commentary: This is not a textbook application of the dramatization of unwanted characters within Gerald, but I hope he will get the message of his internal diversity, and use it in his own way, as he has in the past.

Gerald: I’m taking walks every day now.

Polster: Fine.

Gerald: I started last week.

Polster: Yeah, where are you going? Just around, uh, the neighborhood, or?

Gerald: Wherever, but I’m trying to get out every day.

Polster: Mm.

Gerald: I think it’s good for me, you know, just to get out of the fucking house.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: And uh...

Polster: How does the air feel when you get out there?

Gerald: It feels nice.

Polster: Mm.

Gerald: It feels good to get out of the house.

SESSION SEVENTY-TWO

Gerald: I feel like I’ve, I’ve gotten something out of this therapy, I really do. And I like the fact that you don’t take any shit from me and stuff like that.

Polster: Mm.

Gerald: But I’ve been thinking that, you know, um, [pause] that maybe it’s time to think about stopping this.

Polster: Yeah.

Gerald: Cause for me, in a way, I’ve come as far as I can. I’m going out
and stuff like that. I have a social life now, although it’s certainly no great shakes of a social life, but okay. And I’m just thinking that maybe uh, maybe it’s time to think about wrapping this up.

Polster: I think that uh, it’s important not to think of it as an on or off, like you’re in therapy and then suddenly you’re not in therapy, and I, I don’t want it to be like that. Now whether I want it to be like that isn’t the crucial thing, because you might like it to be like that. But still, you’re asking me what I think about it.

Gerald: Right.

Polster: And that’s my first thought about it, the on or off quality.

Erving Polster Commentary: I don’t want to pressure him to stay because I like his independence and do not want to throw cold water on it. Still, he is cutting out too abruptly and I want to leave his departure more open ended.

Polster: I wouldn’t want you to, to discover some problem and then say, “Fuck it, I knew it all along this is the way it is”. I think you need to have some way of being reminded of your power to work through the barriers.

Gerald: So you think we should continue?

Polster: Maybe not the way we’ve been doing it, maybe occasionally…

Gerald: Occasionally…

Polster: Or even maybe, even just to taper off.

Gerald: Well, well what do you mean by that, in tapering off, in terms of…?

Polster: Well maybe you would come in once a month?

Gerald: Once a month.

Polster: But I don’t think of therapy as an on or off thing, I think of it as an availability when you need it.

Gerald: Right. It’s a good way to stop I think, is to see each other once a month for a few months and then, eh, see how things go.

Polster: Uh huh.
CONCLUSION

Erving Polster Commentary: If I had to pick out one theme in this therapy, it would be one which I have experienced over and over again, and that is the gap that exists between what I see as important and interesting in a person, and what they themselves allow themselves to see as interesting and important. Gerald was a drastic example of this large gap, because he belittled most everything he did, and disregarded his inner qualities, not realizing their value.

Miriam Polster Commentary: My sense was that Gerald was getting glimmerings of these internal qualities, and that if he could build on them, it’s possible that he could thrive and one day be able to look back on this time in his life with humor and forgiveness.
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