THE CITIZEN THERAPIST

Selections fvrom Chapter Eight of
The Ethical Lives of Clients - Transcending Self-Interest in Psychotherapy
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The relational self is a public self.

Once we take seriously the idea of the relational self, it's a small step to understand that ethical responsibility does not end at the edges of the intimate sphere of life—the people we know and directly interact with—but also includes the public sphere of broader civic life. As social animals, we are deeply influenced by what goes on in society and we in turn make choices that influence that broader world in some way. So how does this reality affect the role of the therapist in our time?

There is a civic role for therapists.

The citizen therapist understands the connection between personal and public issues, allows public issues to be part of therapy, and works to promote the health of communities and the larger world.

Helping clients with public stress.

Public stress can come from societal and environmental stressors (recent examples include police shootings and urban riots, and the COVID pandemic), and from political strife (such as contentious elections and political polarization). A citizen therapist makes a place for these issues in clinical practice as they interface with the client's goals and life circumstances.

An expanded civic role for therapists.

Brings the talents, knowledge, and energy of therapists to tackle the public issues that affect our clients' lives.

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Some strategies to begin or enhance your citizen therapist work in your community:

- Identify your clinical passion and connect it to the larger picture.
- Connect to a community concerned with the same issue and listen to the stories.
- Link the personal to the communal—in public. This can be in your online world and in your in-person connections in community.
- Invite people to connect with you in the role of change agent, not client.

References:

Doherty, W. J. (2022). *The ethical lives of clients: Transcending self-interest in psychotherapy.* American Psychological Association.

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