

Illinois Psychological Association

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On November 25, 2012, Lori Gottlieb wrote an article in *The New York Times Magazine*, about her budding career as a psychologist, "The Branding Cure: My so-called career as a therapist." Her article has stimulated a great deal of discussion among our peers.

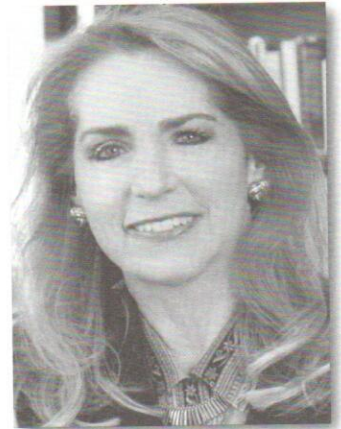
The overarching focus of the article appears to be on the incongruity between the superficial "branding" of one's psychotherapy business and pursuing a "classical" solo private practice. The author is saying that superficial "branding" is antithetical to what we do as clinicians. My perspective, however, is that we all "brand" our work and we don't need to be superficial in our "branding" or self-marketing. At the same time, all of us clinicians can benefit from finding our "niche" in our work, whether it's a certain age group or clinical problem, psychotherapeutic strategy or assessment expertise, specialized body of knowledge or practice arena. Typically, the more mastery we attain with our area of specialization, the more venues we can enter to teach, guest lecture, become an invited conference and workshop speaker, write articles and books, speak to the media about our work, etc. As we become increasingly well known, locally and, sometimes, nationally, the more of an uptick we will see in our patient referrals. I don't believe that we need to hire "branding coaches" but, in the natural course of pursuing our interests, we learn what we do best and how to find a market for what we do.

It is pertinent to note that Lori Gottlieb is quite a media personality and impressively prolific writer. In 2010, she had a *New York Times* best-seller *Marry Him: The Case for Settling for Mr. Good Enough*. This book was based on several articles that she had published in the popular press, including *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Los Angeles Jewish Journal*, *The Huffington Post*, among scores of others. Gottlieb lists over 200 magazine articles and over 1,000 media appearances on her website, just in the last decade. It's curious to me that, in this most recent *New York Times* article, she is bemoaning her fate as an underemployed "therapist" when, in reality, she is an incredibly busy and successful professional writer and media personality who seems to have specialized in psychological issues. There's a level of disingenuousness in Gottlieb's article that strikes a nerve with

me. While she is purporting to be "us," a full-time "therapist," she is also purporting to criticize "us" and our profession as in "insider." While she touts having had six years of graduate training as well as internship training, she never explicitly acknowledges that she has a doctoral degree in psychology and she does not appear to be actually struggling with "our" issues. She purports to be someone who "is just a person trained to sit in a room and ... help people understand themselves better." She, instead, appears to be a marketing maven who has been exceptionally successful in marketing herself and her understanding of parenting, relationships, dating, social media, child development, among other popular talk show topics. While Gottlieb is dismissive of her purported psychologist peers' working with "branding coaches" to be able to bring in a higher revenue stream, she has branded herself as an "expert" on psychological issues and has successfully created a great career for herself in that "expert" role.

While Gottlieb tries to establish authenticity in her article by talking about her reluctance to self-disclose on a professional website, she, in fact, has abundantly self-disclosed in her book. For example, she acknowledges that she has not found a husband and chose single motherhood and that she has a personal dating coach.

Gottlieb quotes Katherine Nordal in the 2010 APA Monitor article, "Where has all the psychotherapy gone?": "30 percent fewer patients received psychological interventions in 2008 than they did 11 years earlier." Gottlieb cites Nordal's statistic as a reason why many psychologists are trying to become more commercially (and superficially) marketable to beef up their client caseload. In fact, in that article, Nordal also wrote that, "While the percentage (3.37) of Americans who receive outpatient mental health care in 2007 is very similar to the proportion of those (3.18 percent)



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receiving such treatment in 1998, the pattern of that care has changed. Overall there has been a decrease in the use of psychotherapy only, a decrease in the use of psychotherapy in conjunction with medication and a big increase in the use of medication only." Gottlieb, in using only part of Nordal's quote, chooses not to explore the actual multi-system complexities in the delivery of mental health treatment, today, that would contextualize, in an informative manner, some of the complicated issues facing mental health in today's environment.

Gottlieb criticizes teletherapy. There are numerous legitimate reasons to criticize teletherapy but many psychologists, especially those in rural areas are finding that teletherapy, as an adjunct to in-person mental health service delivery, can be an added resource. It is ironic, then, that Gottlieb herself uses a form of teletherapy by giving advice to parents, teachers, lovelorn 30-somethings, from nationally televised stages in carefully constructed short media-savvy sound bites.

All kinds of people take potshots at psychologists. Because Gottlieb claims that she is a full-time "therapist," her criticisms of our work appear to be more credible. However, her criticisms do not appear to be based on her actual experience. She is, primarily, a writer and a television personality who grabbed onto some superficialities in the field of psychotherapy and has done us quite a disservice under the guise of bemoaning her own downtrodden fate. She, perhaps, was paid well for her article and has furthered her reputation as a "pop" psychological "expert." But, she has not really understood the talents and highly trained skills of the early career psychologist. Nor, has she truly understood the movement of psychologists into coordinated

health teams and the vast numbers of people in our communities who are desperately in need of mental health services but cannot access them because of scarcity of resources in their communities. Psychologists, today have many options for practice. Many of us will pursue exciting professional opportunities without pandering to superficial marketing ploys. Rather, we will use our skills as excellent mental health practitioners to market the contributions that we can make to improve the mental health in our communities.

Sandy Hook Tragedy

In recent weeks, we witnessed the horror of 20 young children and 6 adults (including the school psychologist, Mary Sherlach) having been murdered at the Sandy Hook elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut. Many of us hold very strong opinions about the causes of those murders and we hold strong and deep feelings about the perpetrator and his family, as well as the victims and their families. As we discuss these terrible and heartbreaking events, let's remember to treat each other with respect and compassion even as we listen and respond to opinions that may differ from our own. Each one of us is informed by our unique experiences and each one of our opinions, when expressed in a professional and civil manner, is worthy of being heard.

2013

Happy New Year to all! May we at IPA celebrate our new year with an expectation that this year will bring us good health, deepening wisdom, and continued successes. ■