Conference Proposal
Getting Levinas and Buber into Therapy
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<u>Title:</u> In-habiting Buber's Thought in the Practice of Psychotherapy

**Abstract:** This paper addresses the multiple ways Martin Buber's thought has shaped my approach to the practice of psychotherapy. Although trained in the existential-phenomenological approach to psychology at Duquesne University it was only after finishing a Ph.D. in clinical psychology there that I came to dwell with Buber's thought in depth. My appreciation grew as I taught an undergraduate course in the Psychology of Interpersonal Relations using I and Thou as a primary text. Teaching Buber to undergraduates forced me to translate the rich aphorisms of I and Thou into teachable concepts that connect with the everyday experiences of life-as-relation. Teaching Buber I also learned to embody his thought in my therapeutic practice. In this paper I share four concepts emerging from my teaching of Buber that have come to shape the way I practice psychotherapy: openness to surprise, particularity of each encounter, relational exclusivity and mutuality. Each of these four concepts have become ethical touchstones in my approach to psychotherapy. The paper will ground these concepts in Buber's thought and in the concrete description of lived experiences with clients drawn from thirty years of teaching, clinical supervision, and therapeutic practice. Rather than highlight philosophical differences the paper will conclude with reflection upon the complementary relationship of Buber's thought with that of Levinas in grounding the ethical practice of psychotherapy.