

# Adaptation

Christine Petrich, MD

*J Am Acad Psychiatry Law* 43:103, 2015

I drive a long way to work. As I travel westward to my Denver office, I become aware of the Red Rocks in the distance. I know the rocks are red, and I see that they are red. But as the blue morning light shines on them, I see that they are blue. Without the blue light, they could not be red. With the blue light, they cannot be simply red. I am in awe of their blue-red beauty.

Blue-red is an impossible color.

As I train in forensic psychiatry, I find I have an impossible task. I must be unbiased. *Of course* I am unbiased (although it is impossible). I am a neutral evaluator, detached (an impossible stance), and I am therapeutic, because I must be. It is what I know of how to be human, and it has been the lion's share of my work as a professional.

I find that I'm better with people than with facts. The objective stance is new territory. I feel like I'm climbing an unfamiliar mountain, afraid to take others down with me when I stumble, overwhelmed with gratitude for the available guidance and gear.

---

Dr. Petrich is a Fellow in Forensic Psychiatry, University of Colorado School of Medicine, Denver, CO. Address correspondence to: Christine Petrich, MD, 3520 W. Oxford Avenue, Mailbox 36, Denver, CO 80236. E-mail: christine.petrich@state.co.us.

Disclosures of financial or other potential conflicts of interest: None.

I'm humbled in the face of the magnitude of human experience, human suffering. I'm humbled, I'm honored to enter people's lives in this way and contribute to the interface of massive social systems. I am in awe of my dually directed duty.

Blue-red does not exist in my retinas. I perceive it somewhere, some when, in a spatiotemporal pattern of cortical activity. It is cool and warm and soothing and invigorating. Where and when might one perceive that I can soothe while I evaluate?

It is not in the report.

I am not your treater, but I want you to be well. We don't have an ongoing therapeutic alliance, but please cooperate with me so that I can understand the facts, even those unfavorable to you, and my understanding can start to approach the truth—or some asymptotic approximation thereof.

Objective truth! Much like objective color. The more certain the facts, the less vibrant, and the less useful.

I need to be useful. Although perfection in this task is impossible, I will make strides. I will learn from the paths of others. I will start to scale the blue-red rocks as a healer who must find my way in this new role. These mountains aren't moving, and there is much work to be done.