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## The Final Act

**Anouchka Grose**

**I**n climate psychology circles there seems to be a great deal of consensus around the idea that the antidote to climate grief is climate action. Of course, no one's so naïve as to think it's an actual cure, just that it can help. Not only does it have the ring of common sense (admittedly a phrase that might make a psychoanalyst's ears prick up), but it's regularly recommended by activists and climate scientists alike, who lend the idea authority by speaking from experience. But what kind of action would be enough to make a difference, either to the individual or to the crisis? And is it still possible to believe in effective climate action after COP26?

To begin with the obvious, the problem is big, and any action one can take will

inevitably feel small. The futility of even the bigger successes – say, being a part of the 2019 protests that caused governments all over the world to declare a climate emergency – can make the prospect of further action depressing. Especially since those same governments' sense of emergency appeared notably lacking only two years later.

**“One of the after-effects of COP26 seems to have been a crisis around the idea of effective action”**



As a psychoanalyst one would be unlikely to be dishing out advice on worthwhile responses to the crisis, let alone having consistent, constructive ideas about it in private. The magnitude of the problem is at the very limits of thinkability and anyone engaging with it is liable to find themselves confronted by a tangle of contradictions and impasses. Is it wiser to focus on the problem, or to pull away? Is there any such thing as a “healthy” position in between? (Answer: no.) Is it worthwhile to analyse an individual’s unconscious attitudes towards such a real-world difficulty? And does any of that make it qualitatively different from any other area of psychoanalytic work? Surely we are always being asked to ‘cure’ people of things we ourselves suffer from, or being confronted by the perpetual nature of distress.

One of the after-effects of COP26 seems to have been a crisis around the idea of effective action. Already the discourse around climate change was fractured and non-uniform. There are those who believe the sanest response is to learn to accept the looming catastrophe. Further down the line, perhaps, are the accelerationists and members of the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement who invite collapse in the name of ripping open alternative futures. Then there are those who believe in changing the system from inside. Or

exiting it altogether. Or that technology will save us. Or that the problem isn’t necessarily all that bad. The concerned, vegan, climate-marching, archetypal eco-anxiety sufferer is only one voice among many, and this group appear to be splitting into those who still adhere to the idea of non-violent civil disobedience and those who are beginning to think we’ve been too polite for too long and that the lacklustre results speak for themselves. Each political position clearly echoes a subject position with regard to an object: give up on it, destroy it, conserve it, negotiate with it, fight for it, and so on. This isn’t to say that one’s attitude to environmental breakdown is somehow developmentally anticipated, just that it’s informed by forces deep at work in us, sometimes beyond our field of vision.

The last group of people – the anxious activists – are perhaps the ones most likely to present their climate-related suffering for therapy or analysis. But if they are already somehow “active” what more can anyone do to help? Perhaps the beginnings of an answer might be found in questions around what it means to “act” at all? Are all actions equal? Are some actions designed to dissemble – to mask helplessness? How might it be possible to help another person find the kind of action that would make a difference, even if only to them?

In “Communicating and Not Communicating Leading to a Study of Certain Opposites” (1963) Winnicott writes about the ways in which an infant uses privation, frustration, and various shattering experiences – alongside more gratifying environmental interactions – in order to construct a habitable world of good enough relationships for itself. If all goes well, thanks to this tangle of pain and pleasure, “*the object changes over from being subjective to being objectively perceived*” (p.182); it can let you down but you can still love it. Your pathway through these experiences will literally be character-building. Of course, nothing is set in stone – or at least, as psychoanalysts, we probably have to believe this – but our “character” will inevitably be a huge determining factor in how we respond to the climate crisis, alongside other factors such as our social milieu, events in the world, our preferred sources of information and the ways in which the algorithm interprets our interests and desires (which perhaps provokes the question, “What is the object relation of an algorithm?”). Although one obviously can’t draw up anything like an organised, horoscope-like schema linking types of childhood experience to ecological engagement, it might at least be helpful to have more nuanced ways of thinking about why some people are waiting for Bill Gates to develop the technology that will save us,

while others are supergluing themselves to corporate glass entrances in the desperate hope of forcing immediate change.

Regarding the climate crisis, and our responses to it, we might extrapolate from all this in two quite different directions. On the one hand we could take the idea of object relations at face value and try to analyse why some people are like this while others are like that. But this would perhaps be to accept too readily that each of us is a discrete entity, and that there is such a thing as “objective reality” to which one can adapt. If the “object” of object relations is related to the Kantian object in that the perplexing, potentially overwhelming object of perception has to be tamed by the concept of the object to the point where the two – experience and concept – can somehow be synthesised into something we experience as convincingly “real”, might we just as well begin to wonder what effect this style of “knowledge” may have on our treatment of the planet? Isn’t it the fact that we can use concepts to discretely organise and portion things off, to separate ourselves from others, nature from culture, humans from other animals, animals from plants, the land from the sea, the sea from the sky and so on, that’s got us into this whole mess in the first place?

In Timothy Morton’s book, *The Ecological Thought* (2008), he develops the idea of the

“hyperobject” in order to begin to rethink our relation to the environment. (Even this last sentence demonstrates the problem — there’s “us” and there’s “the environment”, separated as much as joined by the concept of a “relation”.) Morton’s hyperobject is a challenge to thinkability. Styrofoam is a hyperobject in that it permeates the world and exists in a timescale way beyond our own. Climate change is also a hyperobject in that it defies our notions of categorisation; every single thing that’s ever existed, or will exist, might feasibly be included in the concept “climate change”. “The ecological thought” is just that; the uncanny realisation that what we call “the environment” means absolutely everything, ever. Thinking of ourselves as neutral, rational beings who can act to save poor old Mother Earth (without changing our lives too much in the process) is completely delusional. The enormity and complexity of the problem extends so far beyond anything we can do about it individually that it sends us reeling. The atrocity of the harm done to our unlikely and astonishing world — and all by small, incrementally damaging acts like driving and dressing up — is barely conceivable. It hardly seems real, at the same time as being the most real, even the only real, thing.

Apparently Morton’s choice of term was influenced by Björk’s “Hyperballad”. In this song, the narrator describes a ritual where she wakes up early and throws

random small objects off a cliff. She watches the objects fall and imagines falling with them, crashing onto the rocks below. The ritual enables her to go home to her partner feeling safe and happy; it keeps her world functioning. For anyone in clinical practice, this won’t sound so strange. Plenty of people perform private rituals, especially around the idea of “harm”, in order to cordon off the “badness” — death, decay, aggression, destruction — and get on with living a semblance of a socially sanctioned good life. You could call it a symptom or an attempt at cure. And sometimes these attempts work, hence psychoanalysts’ hesitation around the idea of abrupt symptom removal. What if you made things worse by imposing some generic notion of “better”? What if so-called normality is just another mode of ritual or magical thinking, a means of making ourselves feel like everything is OK?

Where does that leave us with regard to climate action? Isn’t part of the problem that too many of us do rather Björk-like things in order to stave off panic — shop organic, ride bicycles, wear second-hand clothes? We might kid ourselves that we can make a real difference in this way but we’d probably do just as well to throw a fork off a mountain.

In 2019, Extinction Rebellion (XR) burst onto the scene with a fully worked-out

climate action manifesto. Their big, heavily-researched strategy was based on mass non-violent civil disobedience. If you could persuade 3.5% of a population to get involved in peaceful-but-disruptive protest you would, they claimed, quickly force the possibility of real change. At first, things went almost inconceivably well. The world seemed to get on board; people started to listen to climate scientists, climate deniers were delegitimised, and for a moment it began to look like drastic change could actually happen. Then there was XR’s famous Canning Town misstep, the accusations of white privilege against pale, posh protesters blithely throwing themselves into the hands of the lovely, lovely police — not to mention millions of pounds and countless hours of blue chip think tankery ploughed into working out cunning ways to make environmentalists look bad. Whereas for a moment it had seemed as though XR offered an amazing arena for viable climate action, the movement soon came to be characterised as a bunch of clueless white people getting on everyone else’s nerves.

Now we have a terrible situation in the UK where the standard advice on climate-related mental anguish is to act, but this is against the backdrop of a government who are in the process of making protest illegal. You may find yourself too embarrassed to join XR for fear of ridicule, or too frightened for fear of jail. We are

encouraged by right wing politicians to try to bring about change through the “correct channels”, such as voting, but this may only happen every four years and, according to some persuasive calculations, we are due to pass irretrievable ecological tipping points within the decade. Consumer “actions”, like making the right choices, fall just short of superstition, and becoming a lawyer so you can dream up ingenious cases against irresponsible governments and businesses is great, but most of us are doomed to participate at the level of clicktivism, which is apt to leave us feeling powerless and alienated.

**“Once enough of us have had ‘the ecological thought’ our combined actions may start to surge in more ecologically feasible directions”**

So is there anything else left to try? Perhaps the diverse permutations of our possible object relations can be helpful here. In *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* (2021) Andreas Malm questions XR’s insistence on

*Continues on page 4*



non-violence, suggesting that damage to property might be a viable next step since it looks as though an insistence on being nice risks holding things up. While XR point to the Suffragettes and the American Civil Rights Movement as shining examples of effective non-violent action, Malm insists that they were always helped along by a “radical flank” — individuals or groups who were prepared to escalate things physically when the saintly saviours weren’t getting results. So here we have two possible modes of acting; non-violent and a bit more violent (he only advocates damage to property, not people) working together, albeit unofficially. Add to this others: private rituals, self-sufficiency, scientific research, massive cash donations, guerrilla gardening, politics, befriending spiders, orthorexia, documentary-making, education, lobbying, dancing, radical town planning, writing slightly feverish articles, whatever you can dream of that seems like a good idea to you. While each on its own may seem insignificant, perhaps it isn’t impossible to imagine that myriad mini-actions could culminate in a critical mass. As Merlin Sheldrake writes in *The Entangled Life* (2020): “Within complex adaptive systems, small changes can bring about large effects which can only be observed in the system as a whole. Rarely can a neat arrow be plotted between ‘cause’ and ‘effect’. Stimuli — which may be unremarkable gestures in themselves

— swirl into often surprising responses. Financial crashes are a good example of this type of dynamic non-linear process. So are sneezes and orgasms.” Once enough of us have had “the ecological thought” our combined actions may start to surge in more ecologically feasible directions. Somewhat idealistic, it hardly needs to be said, but at least this kind of openness to manifold possibilities might enable psychoanalysts to help their analysands find the kinds of action that suit them.

*Anouchka Grose is a psychoanalyst and writer practicing in London. She is a member of The Centre for Freudian Research, where she regularly lectures. Her non-fiction books include ‘Are you Considering Therapy?’ (Karnac, 2011) and ‘A Guide to Eco-Anxiety: how to protect the planet and your mental health’ (Watkins, 2020). She also writes about art and fashion, and contributes to The Guardian, Radio 4, and Resonance FM.*

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We welcome your ideas for articles, reviews and letters to the Editor. In particular we are looking for reviews of cultural events, books and films with psychoanalytic interest. If you would like to propose a topic for a longer article (up to 2,000 words), please contact Helen Morgan at helen.morgan@bpc.org.uk.

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Summer edition: 20 May

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## Editorial

# A Hostile Environment?

## Helen Morgan

**I**n 2012 the then home secretary Theresa May established the policy that aimed to cut off undocumented migrants from access to any public services including health care, thus creating a 'Hostile Environment'. Putting aside the questionable morality behind such an attitude towards the suffering stranger, the idea that a society can maintain an attitude of hostility towards any one group residing within its borders without contamination of the whole culture seems psychologically unsustainable.

I was reminded of this phrase whilst reading the articles for this edition of *New Associations* for many seemed to be a consideration not only of the consequences of aggression directed towards particular individuals or groups, but also of the environment out of which those acts of aggression arise.

The opening article by Anouchka Grose considers our literal environment that is the planet earth and the damage

humans have done in our march towards 'progress'. She emphasises how our attempts to stand outside of this incredible interconnected ecosystem are profoundly flawed and with devastating consequences, as it is this very assumption of separation which is the root cause of the problem. As she stresses, this position is predicated on an assumption that "*there's 'us' and there's 'the environment', separated as much as joined by the concept of a 'relation'.*"

Anna Motz writes movingly about the hostile atmosphere of misogyny that is alarmingly present within our culture, out of which such horrific acts as the murders of Sarah Everard and Sabina Nessa can take place. As in the case of George Floyd, the fact that Everard was murdered by an officer of society's institution for the enforcement of its laws has been especially shocking.

The articles by Esther Rapoport on bisexuality, Daniel Anderson on sexuality and the group and Poul Rohleder on public displays of intimacy by same-sex couples all expose the degrees of antagonism and

homophobia that are directed towards the LGBTQ+ community within society at large.

**"... the idea that a society can maintain an attitude of hostility towards any one group residing within its borders without contamination of the whole culture seems psychologically unsustainable"**

But the psychoanalytic profession is also an environment within the larger

ecosystem of society and we have had our own positions in both theory and practice that have done harm to individuals whose sexuality does not conform to an overly rigid heteronormative view. The title of the 2021 BPC annual conference last November was ‘Sexual Diversity and Psychoanalysis: Acknowledging the Past and Looking to the Future’ and Joanna Ryan’s review gives a critical overview of the dynamics of the conference. The Statement of Regret which was read out by the BPC chair was an important, albeit limited, step towards addressing our profession’s historic hostility towards gay and lesbian individuals, but so much more work clearly needs to be done. For, whilst acknowledging historic prejudice, it was evident throughout the day that homophobic thinking continues to do harm. This was most striking when three trainees painted a disturbing picture of what it is like to train if you are LGBTQ+. Alice Kentridge was one of those trainees and, as one of the convenors of the Queer Analytic Circle (QAC), an open peer support group for LGBTQ+ therapists and trainees, she has written an important and challenging piece for this edition.

The term ‘environment’ in the analytic context inevitably perhaps evokes its

opposite, the facilitating environment that Winnicott described. This, I think, is what Katerina Horrox is reaching towards when describing the work of outdoor therapy. This is clearly a healing possibility for the individual, but I found myself wondering what a society that seeks to promote a facilitating environment would look like. And what would our profession look like if we sought to examine all aspects of our unconscious hostility towards different groups and do the necessary work to ensure we establish a professional container within which all individuals might thrive?

Turning to *New Associations* news, I am sad to report that Candida Yates stepped down from the Editorial Board due to the pressure of her work commitments. She had been an important and very supportive member of the Board for some while now and her contributions will be greatly missed. Many thanks to her.

NB. Because of the publication timeline all articles were commissioned and written before the start of war in Ukraine. The summer edition of *New Associations* will include pieces concerning the hostilities and their implications.



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## Violence against women

# Murder, Betrayal and Denial

**Anna Motz**

**S**arah Everard's murder in March 2021 shocked the nation. There were many vigils for her, a young woman whose violent rape and death occurred at the hands of police-officer, Wayne Couzens. He had used Covid powers to conduct a fake arrest of the 33-year-old Marketing Executive as she walked home from her friend's house. He is now serving a whole-life order in prison and will die in jail, as he will never be released.

The story generated high levels of anxiety and distress, especially for young women, and undermined public confidence in the police. As a result, the Metropolitan police has been heavily criticised for its missed opportunities to identify Couzens' risk despite previous accusations of indecent exposure in 2015 and again just a few days before Everard's murder. It also emerged that he had been known as "the rapist" by staff at Civil Nuclear Constabulary because he made female colleagues feel so uneasy. Yet he was allowed to keep working.

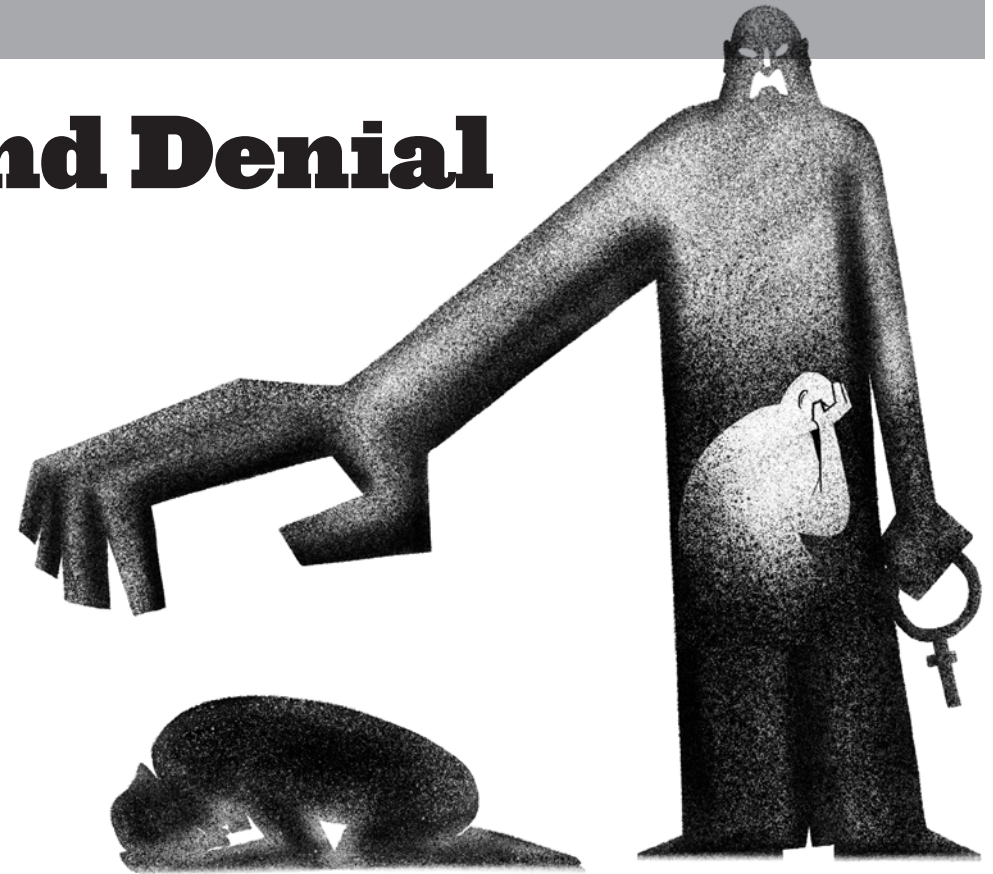
How can we understand this kind of violence, and what are its origins? What makes Sarah Everard's case different from the so-called "ordinary" deaths? Perhaps now there will be greater vigilance around screening and any historical sexual offences by members of the forces, but the psychological disturbance of an individual who covers his tracks may well still escape detection. Nothing has changed aside from the fact that a brutal rape and murder was widely reported and involved deception and fatal sexual violence by a police officer.

Sadly, events like the rape and murder of young women are not unusual.

The 2019 figures from the Office for National Statistics reveals the widespread nature of violence against women:

*Almost one in three women aged 16-59 will experience domestic abuse in her lifetime.*

*Two women a week are killed by a current or former partner in England and Wales alone.*



*In the year ending March 2019, 1.6 million women experienced domestic abuse.*

Many of the documented cases that weren't reported by the media are as tragic and shocking as Sarah Everard's, but it is easy for us as a society to turn a blind eye to their existence, or to "other" both the victims and perpetrators as though they are "not us", and so we can breathe freely.

Perhaps for the majority of white, middle-class women, Sarah Everard was an easy person with whom to identify – she could have been my daughter, sister, friend or next-door neighbour. That the perpetrator was Wayne Couzens was a shocking development, as he presented initially as an ordinary hard-working policeman, vigilant and concerned when he saw someone apparently breaching Lockdown rules. Like most of us would when approached by a

*Continues on page 9*



uniformed officer, Sarah Everard obeyed him as he handcuffed her and ordered her into his car. She was taught to respect the law and obey those in charge even if she didn't quite understand why she was being arrested in that fashion. We would all probably have behaved in a similar way, perhaps protesting but still compliant. This could have been me. But do we apply that same thinking to other women who are killed by their partners? Or do we imagine we would never allow ourselves to get into these risky situations – that somehow, we would intuit and avoid intimate danger?

### **Understanding Public Response to the Sarah Everard Murder**

This murder has a particular resonance because it is the stuff of nightmares – the trusted protector, who is also a stranger and a powerful member of society, becomes the sadistic rapist, and then killer. It is possibly also because the main protagonists are white. Her case attracted far more attention than that of Sabina Nessa, whose murder occurred that same week, also by a stranger. Without detracting from the sheer horror of Sarah Everard's kidnap, rape and death, I can't help but think that it seemed to carry more weight than the murders of other young women perhaps because of how easy it is for middle-class society to identify with her as a friend or a daughter, or as a member of the public

who trusted someone in authority. Other factors that unconsciously shape our responses may, sadly, relate to the colour of her skin, or the status of her killer.

As Richard McCann, son of Peter Sutcliffe's first victim Wilma McCann, poignantly notes in Carole Hayman's film *No One Escapes*, "they talked about 'prostitutes' being killed, as opposed to 'innocent women'". The bodies and minds of prostitutes are denigrated both by those who have exploited them and then a second time, in death, by other members of the public when they have been murdered.

The notion of "innocence" is often used to describe particular kinds of victims of crime, such as hard-working, professional and non-criminalised women like Sarah Everard, or perhaps students, or children like Arthur Labinjo-Hughes who died due to parental cruelty and neglect. No one deserves to be killed, even Wayne Couzens, but the idea that victims are more or less blameworthy is particularly disturbing. Our responses to those who are murdered reveals much about our unconscious notions not just of "innocence" or "guilt", but also of justice. Implicit in these descriptions is the idea that some people deserve to live more than others, which is accordingly what the media plays back to us, one way or the other. Unconscious biases and conscious fears tend to manifest in how we respond to particular deaths,

and identify with particular victims.

The *rage* we feel stems in part from our sense of betrayal by an institution we are taught to trust: the police. As with Beverly Allitt, who used her role as a paediatric nurse to harm and kill babies under the cover of care, or Harold Shipman, who used his medical role to kill patients, the notion that those we trust, those in socially respectable and powerful positions, can be so dangerous and deceptive is particularly terrifying. And yet, these cases are rare. The most dangerous perpetrators of harm to most individuals are neither strangers, nor the uncommon cases of premeditated murderers, using disguise to gain our trust, but family members and partners, whose crimes can be covered up within the home. The public reaction to the Everard case, while understandable, may still be a diversion from addressing the widespread violence that exists much closer to home.

The criminal statistics reveal the danger that women face from intimate partners, and that most of their assailants were known to the victim. Similarly, in cases of child sexual abuse those that are most widely reported tend to be the "stranger danger" ones, yet it is far more common for abuse to be perpetrated by trusted adults already known to the children, sometimes in caring positions. We must examine our wish to have the danger located "out there" in a stranger, rather than consider

the huge risk in the home, lurking in the hearts and minds of those we love and trust. Most killers of women and children are not disturbed individuals dressed as police, but ordinary men, who may have decent jobs, nice homes, and reasonable salaries, but who nonetheless feel out of control, ashamed and desperate. This does not justify their violence but may help us understand it. From the outside, Couzens too may have looked "ordinary", with two young children and a wife.

### **The Functions of Violence**

For those who feel powerless, violence can be intoxicating. For those who fear abandonment and disrespect, establishing ownership and control over others can be the solution to their underlying terrors. One basis for the successful treatment of antisocial men in forensic psychotherapy and in Mentalization Based Therapy is the awareness that violence is often a defence against fear and shame, and that there is a significant link between disturbed attachment systems from early life, histories of trauma, betrayal and distrust and disrupted care, leading to profound difficulty in forming relationships. A significant proportion of these offenders have experienced and witnessed intimate partner violence in their own early lives, though not all of those victimized will go on to repeat it. The impact of abuse and violence is significant beyond the physical

pain it inflicts, creating a relationship between perpetrator and victim in which the abused becomes objectified and dehumanised, brutalised for the gratification of the aggressor. Repeated intrusion into the bodies of victims also impacts on their minds. Sexual violence is yet another form of brutalisation that stamps ownership on the bodies and minds of victims. There is often an escalation in the violence of domestic “intimate partner terrorists”. The excitement and relief of a violent act ceases to satisfy and a more intense act is required to obtain the same release. Similarly, there was clearly a huge escalation in Couzens’ actions, from indecent exposure, a relatively low risk offence, to what appears to be a planned murder. This pattern often defines the move from fantasies of violence to action, but most indecent exposures do not lead to kidnapping, rape and murder.

I have not met with Wayne Couzens but am aware of his reported obsession with violent pornography, body-building and guns, which suggests that his violence can be seen, at least in part, as an attempt to gain power and control in order to defeat an underlying sense of shame and inadequacy. Psychiatrist James Gilligan (1997) describes the role of shame beautifully, seeing violence as a public epidemic that must be understood to be prevented. He has worked in high-security

prisons in the United States with violent offenders, and traces it to a pervasive sense of shame, with roots in traumatic early experiences and trajectories that repeat these.

The fear of vulnerability, shame and rejection underlies much of the violence of the men with whom I have worked in forensic services. Their violence can be seen not just as a product of gender bias and social constructions of masculinity but also as an expression of tremendous, often unseen damage. The terror and vulnerability that underlies their violence is evident through therapeutic intervention that focusses on their capacity to regulate disturbed attachment systems, by linking fears of loss to “non-mentalizing” responses, including violence. MBT for men classified with Antisocial Personality Disorder has had some success in violence-reduction for high-risk offenders.

### **Denial of Domestic and Gender Based Violence**

Sarah Everard’s case has highlighted not just an individual high-profile murder, but the hundreds of unreported cases of domestic killing of women and girls and our denial of its ubiquity. To address this public health issue, I suggest that it is not helpful to further shame all men, but essential to acknowledge and address the roots of violence in our society, starting with the earliest relationships – those

that shape our capacity to identify and contain our feelings, to trust others and to manage intense experiences of shame and anger. Unfortunately, our present government, “breaking free” from the yoke of Europe and the restraints of law, seems to denigrate any form of dependency and feeds into an idealization of toxic masculinity – hiding shame and fear underneath brazen displays of rule-breaking.

The damage the case of Sarah Everard has done to the police force, many of whom are women, and most of whom are not murderers, is enormous. It is not difficult to see how this dramatic abuse of police power, in the service of murder, has shattered our deeply held beliefs in justice, honour and safety. And yet, it may also help to focus our attention on those hundreds of un-reported cases of domestic homicides and assaults that may also include acts of sexual brutality. Other men who are respected citizens in society can and do control and intimidate their families, acts that are concealed until serious or even fatal injury brings them out of the shadows. Whether they are police, clergymen, dentists or prison officers, their private violence may never come into the public realm.

We should respond to the Sarah Everard case not just as evidence of fault in the screening systems of the police force, or

a manifestation of individual “evil”, but also as an expression of more ordinary violence, with complex individual and social origins. Certainly we need to address signs of disturbance in emergency workers early on and ensure our screening systems are thorough, that risk is not denied, and that the guise of authority does not make us blind to danger. But the function of this violence and its ubiquity in our society demands attention too. It is incumbent on us not to look away from violence, or view it as simply the expression of individual psychopathology, but to learn from it, examining its cultural, social and psychological roots and the shame that often underlies it. Only by becoming aware of our blind-spots to the violence in our midst can we understand and treat it.

*Anna Motz is a Consultant Clinical and Forensic Psychologist, Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist and Mentalization Based Therapy Supervisor. She works for Central and Northwest London NHS Trust at HMP Bronzefield, providing specialist consultation for high-risk women and staff teams. She has written and lectured on forensic psychotherapy and violence, and is author of the forthcoming book If Love Could Kill: The Myth and Truth of Female Violence.*

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PPNow 2021

# PPNow 2021 Awards

PSYCHOANALYTIC  
PSYCHOTHERAPY  
NOW ——— 2021

**W**e are excited and proud to announce the winners of our PPNow 2021 awards.

The PPNow awards celebrate outstanding individuals and organisations within our psychoanalytic community.

## **Innovative Excellence winner: Dr Valerie Sinason**



*This award celebrates a striking example of ground-breaking work. The*

*innovative nature of the work can be in terms of clinical practice, research, or socially inclusive practice, such as working with sections of the community who may traditionally find access to therapeutic treatment difficult.*

## **“has worked tirelessly to promote the study of trauma and sexual abuse”**

For more than forty-five years, Dr. Valerie Sinason, a long-standing registrant of the British Psychoanalytic Council, has worked tirelessly to promote the study of trauma and sexual abuse. Although these topics may seem “standard” to every modern-day psychological practitioner, back in the 1970s, virtually no one wrote about or talked about the sexual abuse of children. Sinason spoke about this topic and wrote about it extensively, not only describing horrific cases among child patients, but also among those child patients and adult patients who suffered from profound disabilities (whether physical or intellectual). It will not be widely known that when, in the 1980s, Sinason identified a case of sexual abuse in an adult patient at the Tavistock Clinic, several senior staff members questioned whether parents

could actually harm their children in this way. Over the last several decades, Sinason – a trained child psychotherapist and adult psychoanalyst – has pioneered not only the fields of trauma and abuse, but also the discipline of “disability psychotherapy”, and became the founding President of the Institute of Psychotherapy and Disability, providing psychotherapy for those patients who had no verbal capacities. In the 1990s, Sinason expanded upon her work with abused children and disabled children and pioneered the field of treating patients who had been ritually abused in paedophile rings by large numbers of adults. The police investigators at Scotland Yard supported this work and confirmed the awful reality of such cases. Sinason has served as a clinician, as a teacher, as a supervisor, and as a writer of many blue-sky books, not least her 1992 classic, “Mental Handicap and the Human Condition”, now about to be released in its third edition. I can think of no other living colleague within the British Psychoanalytic Council who has approached the field of child physical abuse and child sexual abuse with such compassion and bravery.

## **Outstanding Professional Leadership winner: Dr Liz Allison**



*This award recognises an individual in a position of leadership who has developed their role to*

*make a significant and outstanding contribution to developing the position and/or influence of psychoanalytic/psychodynamic psychotherapy in the wider world.*

Dr Allison is the Director of the Psychoanalysis Unit at UCL, a psychoanalyst and member of the British Psychoanalytical Society. I believe she deserves this nomination because of the impact her work continues to have on actively promoting psychoanalysis worldwide. This includes major achievements in education, research, knowledge transfer and enabling the promotion of



psychoanalytic ideas in the academic world, in the international psychoanalytic community and beyond. Furthermore, her work in organising, chairing and participating in conferences, lectures, exhibitions and ceaselessly redeveloping and expanding important threads of thinking as a writer and editor demonstrate her unwavering commitment to using her position of leadership to share so much with others in a truly engaging and multifaceted dialogue.

**“unwavering  
commitment to  
using her position  
of leadership to  
share so much  
with others”**

Of the many projects Dr Allison is involved in, I think the PEP/UCL top authors project should be highlighted. For this project, she was the producer and director of a series of short films interviewing eminent psychoanalysts about their key papers. To date, 62 interviews have been recorded and the finished films are available via Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing where they can be viewed by students and scholars of psychoanalysis, as well as clinicians worldwide.

She supervises students on both the Psychoanalysis Unit's Doctoral Programme and the MSc in Theoretical Psychoanalysis, where she is well respected by all and sought after. Dr Allison is also a member of the Editorial Board of Routledge's New Library of Psychoanalysis and an Associate Member of the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Psychoanalysis. With Peter Fonagy and Mary Target, she is Editor of Karnac's Developments in Psychoanalysis book series. I believe Dr Allison is one of the unsung heroes working in academia today and should be honoured and celebrated for promoting psychoanalysis in such varied ways.

**Bernard Ratigan Award  
for Psychoanalysis and  
Diversity winner: Dr Poul  
Rohleder**



*This award  
applauds an  
individual or  
organisation  
that has  
significantly  
improved  
and/or*

*developed inclusivity in matters of  
diversity such as ethnicity, sexual  
orientation, class, disability etc.  
in psychoanalytic practice and/or  
therapeutic treatment.*

**“His energy and  
commitment  
to diversity in  
the profession  
deserve  
recognition”**

Since coming to the UK and training as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist at the BPF, Poul has made a huge impact on many fronts - research, writing about his clinical work and contributing to the life of his training organisation. He joined the executive committee of the Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Association of the BPF and is chair of the BPF Scientific and Applied Activities Committee. He has been diversity representative on the Board of the BPC and he is book reviews editor for the BJP. In South Africa where he trained in clinical psychology he worked in the field of AIDS research and published a number of papers focusing on the impact of shame on the participation of young men in treatment programmes. Since training at the BPF and working at the University of Essex, he has contributed to several publications, including “Sexuality and Gender Now: moving beyond heteronormativity“ edited by Leezah Hertzmann and Juliet Newbiggin. He and colleagues set up the “LGBTQ Holding

Hands” research project which features in the programme for PPNOW. His energy and commitment to diversity in the profession deserve recognition.

*Celebrating the incredible work in  
our profession is so important. We  
invite you to start considering your  
nominations for the PPNOW Awards  
2022. Award nominations will open  
on our website by Summer.*

PPNow 2021

# Statement of Regret

PSYCHOANALYTIC  
PSYCHOTHERAPY  
NOW ——— 2021

**T**he topic of an apology or statement of regret similar to the American Psychoanalytic Association was first discussed at a BPC Council meeting in June 2020. A draft was then discussed at length in the October 2020 Council meeting, with a diverse range of views from the Member Institutions (MIs). A poll showed that 58% of attendees felt the draft needed further revisions.

After significant discussion, with some MIs feeling we had not gone far enough with the statement and some feeling we had gone too far, the BPC Board decided to find a compromise that most MIs would be willing to agree to. It was decided that MIs would not need to actively sign the statement of regret, it would be from the BPC. MIs could then choose to adopt and/or share this statement. This approach was taken so as not to 'name and shame' MIs who did not, for a variety of reasons, agree with the statement. It was felt that a harsher approach would have been counterproductive in making progress around these issues in the profession. The final statement of regret was sent to all MIs by the previous BPC Chair in February 2021, and was shared publicly at

the PPNow conference in November 2021:

Today, this BPC conference on Sexuality is continuing the process which was begun in 2011 when the BPC issued a Position Statement that said, "The British Psychoanalytic Council does not accept that a homosexual orientation is evidence of disturbance of the mind or in development". This statement made clear the BPC's opposition to discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.

Freud himself said that homosexuality was "nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation, it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function produced by a certain arrest of sexual development."

Despite his final qualification: "a certain arrest of sexual development", Freud was clear that homosexuality was not an illness, an incredibly progressive attitude for his time, and one that for the most part, psychoanalysis continued to advocate. However, in the decades that followed, there were some in the psychoanalytic and psychoanalytic psychotherapy community who moved to a more conservative place.

We know that in America, psychoanalysts played a significant role in ensuring that homosexuality was included in the psychiatric diagnostic nomenclature and opposed its removal. While in the UK, the situation was different, with several psychoanalysts involved in the Wolfenden Report that led to the decriminalising of homosexuality. Nevertheless there were also some within the profession that conceptualised homosexuality as evidence of psychopathology.

This stigmatising of same sex desire, led to some individuals with a gay, lesbian or bisexual orientation, suffering as a result of therapies which represented and treated their sexuality as evidence of a disorder and encouraged them to mistrust their own feelings. Because of these views, there were even instances of gay men and lesbian women being denied the opportunity to train as psychoanalytic therapists. This has been painful and hurtful for the individuals concerned but has also resulted in the loss of a historically more inclusive and diverse contribution to the professional life of many of our psychoanalytic organisations, impacting on the scientific life of our organisations.

Those of us practising now cannot speak on behalf of our analytic parents and grandparents. They are no longer alive and, it seems, they genuinely thought the theories they subscribed to were helpful and relevant. We can however, on the occasion of this Conference, express our profound regret that it has taken so long for more appropriate and progressive theories and practice about homosexuality to evolve and gain support within the profession. We can also express our profound regret that in the past there have been men and women who have been deprived of an opportunity to develop their interest in, and curiosity about psychoanalytic/analytic theory and practice.

However confident we may be that this could not happen today, we must recognise that there were some problematic episodes in our history, and we want to make it clear that the BPC, together with the support of our Member Institutions, will continue our work to ensure we provide therapeutic and training opportunities that reflect psychoanalytic principles which are non-discriminatory, and non-stigmatising.

PPNow 2021

# Can We Be Out Inside?

PSYCHOANALYTIC  
PSYCHOTHERAPY  
NOW ——— 2021

*Discussing LGBTQ+ Training Experiences at the PP Now Conference*

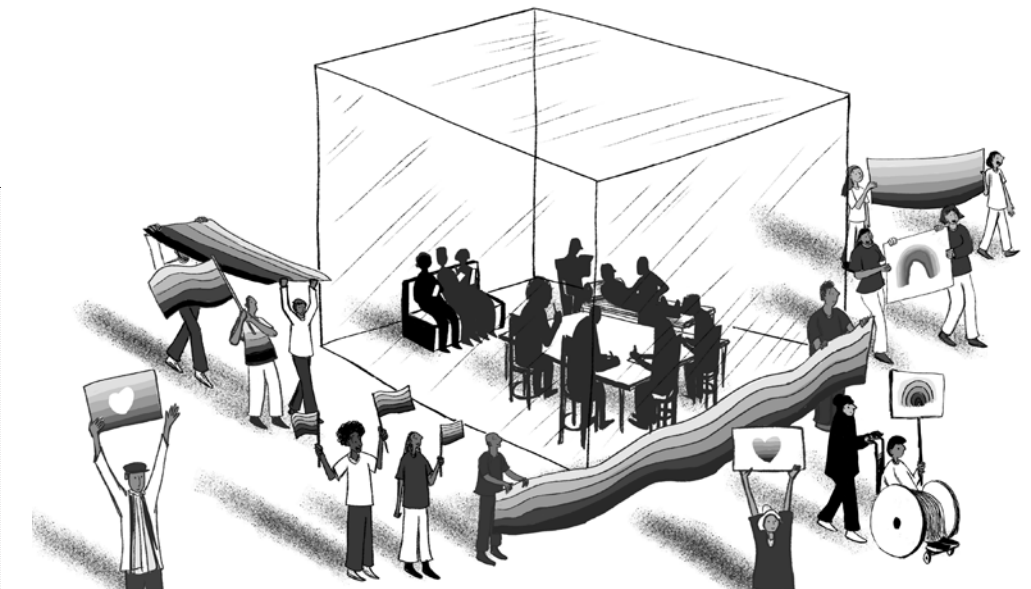
## Alice Kentridge

**S**ome time ago I had a dream in which I was at a gathering of psychotherapists in a wood paneled room. There was a discussion taking place. We were asked to go around and say whether we “innovate in theory or in practice”. On the back wall of the room there was a window with blinds ajar. Through them I could see a party going on. It had the feel of a Pride party. People were walking by in leather gear. There was music, an outdoor shower. In the room we, the group of therapists, concertedly acted as if nothing was going on.

In November, I was invited to join a panel discussion at the PPNow conference, *Sexual Diversity and Psychoanalysis: Acknowledging the Past and Looking to the Future*. The panel was on experiences of LGBTQ+ trainees on analytic trainings. The invitation was to bring thoughts and

experiences from a group that I am part of, the Queer Analytic Circle (QAC). The QAC, which has been running for three years – in person and then online – is an open peer support group for LGBTQ+ therapists and trainees interested in the meeting point between analytic approaches and queer thought and experiences. We meet to read papers and reflect on theory, and also to discuss the challenges we as queer therapists face both in training, and in the profession more broadly.

In preparing for the panel, I felt I was doing the familiar therapeutic work of metabolizing; filtering many conversations with friends and colleagues, putting into words frustrations, disappointments and fears. On the panel, along with two colleagues, we talked about the experience of training. We reflected on what it is like to train in a profession where active “debates” about aspects



of our lives, loves, and practices circle around us; where swimming against the homophobic currents in theory, readings and formulations demands our energy, focus, and outrage; and where much of this atmosphere remains invisible to our peers and tutors.

When the QAC met as a group in September to discuss experiences of training, we found that everyone there had taken a break in their training at some point. Though each had their own reasons, and many straight trainees take breaks in study too, taken together we felt it reflected

*Continues on page 15*



the degree to which we train in the face of resistance. In our meetings we've often discussed the parts of ourselves that had to be left outside of our trainings. The feeling that visibly gay or queer aesthetics would be frowned upon, for example. We see a chasm between the lively parts of queer culture we live openly outside of training and the stilted or hostile conversation taking place within, for example around non-monogamy, kink, exploring gender expression, and trans experience.

It seems to us that, as queer people, we are asked to hold toxic elements for the group, or that we come to stand as markers for the parts of the profession or tradition that might be best gotten rid of. There was a feeling that on our trainings, we come to hold all the shame of sexuality and all the badness of disavowed homophobia that can't be borne collectively. These burdens have weighed down our experiences of training but also work to exclude LGBTQ+ people from trainings in the first place.

The QAC is also a group open to queer therapists and trainees who've trained in other modalities but have an interest in analytic thought. These are often LGBTQ+ people who attended information sessions or lectures in our institutions, who interviewed for analytic trainings, or did introductory courses and felt this could not be their home. These are people who encountered homophobia

at that threshold, who raised questions about psychoanalytic stances that were met defensively or dismissively, or who picked up on the feeling that they had stumbled into the wrong place. Those lost to the profession before they even began.

## **“as queer people, we are asked to hold toxic elements for the group”**

On the panel we thought about how our analytic trainings can recreate aspects of the uncomfortable, disapproving family – framing our critiques or reactions to readings as the response of the difficult, overly sensitive child, the one whose difference is a problem. Or how training can mirror the history of policed desires many of us have lived through, bringing to mind the era of Section 28, the law that prohibited “the promotion of homosexuality” by local authorities that stifled educators and others from 1988-2003. It is as if on our trainings we take in a Section 28 of the mind, telling us that to be open about our sexuality is a sign of an agenda, of being too political, or not sufficiently analytic. The panel was a chance to speak back to that, to claim a place inside the room, as out but not

outside, a critical but engaged part of the psychoanalytic world.

Sharing my dream at the conference led to the following thread of associations: Svetlana Palmer, also on the panel, reminded us of the historical echo of the “controversial discussions”. Psychoanalysts engaged in a painful internal conflict, while outside bombs of the blitz were falling. In the famous account of one of those meetings by Margaret Little, she describes:

“A noisy evening with bombs dropping every few minutes and people ducking as each crash came. In the middle of the discussions someone I later came to know as D.W. [Donald Winnicott] stood up and said, “I should like to point out that there is an air raid going on”, and sat down. No notice was taken, and the meeting went on as before! (Little, 1985, p. 19)”

Jack Drescher, the conference keynote speaker, responded with his own memory of a psychoanalytic meeting taking place on in New York on September 11th 2001, where again the human demands of the external world were put aside and the meeting continued, a detachment which he rejected, leaving to go and donate blood.

These three meetings, real, remembered, or imagined, place us in a scene in

a moment of division, change, and disruption, a scene resonant with the current moment. Internal conflicts within the psychoanalytic profession were hinted at in the PP Now conference, for example the resistance faced by organizers to the inclusion of a Statement of Regret for homophobic practices within psychoanalysis that was read out. And the exclusion of trans people from that statement, which was loud in its absence. There is a damage done by these exclusions, but equally a damage being done within the room, an aliveness being kept at bay that deadens us all.

To return to my dream, I am being asked how I would innovate. I turn to the window and say, “I'm not saying therapists should have a huge orgy but perhaps there's something we can learn from this.”

*Alice Kentridge is a psychodynamic psychotherapist working in private practice and in the NHS. She teaches and writes on gender and sexuality and is a co-founder of the Queer Analytic Circle (QAC). The QAC is an open support and discussion group for LGBTQ+ trainees and practitioners. To join the mailing list email [queeranalyticcircle@gmail.com](mailto:queeranalyticcircle@gmail.com)*

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PPNow 2021

# Review of BPC PPNow 2021 on Sexual Diversity and Psychoanalysis

PSYCHOANALYTIC  
PSYCHOTHERAPY  
NOW ——— 2021

**Joanna Ryan**

**A**s a psychoanalytic psychotherapist from outside the BPC<sup>1</sup>, long involved in these issues, the conference was both welcome and frustrating. We were lucky to have the knowledgeable, wise and also radical presence of Dr Jack Drescher, a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst from New York. He gave two keynote papers, firstly on the history of controversies in the treatment of Transgender children and adolescents, and then the next day, on Psychoanalysis and Homosexuality from the Pre-oedipal to the Postmodern. These historical perspectives were invaluable in grounding the conference in an understanding of the processes of change and resistance in psychoanalytic ideas, and questioning the immutability of any one theory. Drescher

1 I'm grateful to the organisers of the conference for inviting me to be one of the main speakers, and regret that I was not in a position to do so.

outlined the vital role of opposition and protest in both the US and UK in challenging prevailing theories that defined homosexuality as perversion and/or arrested pre-oedipal development per se, and gradually bringing about some inclusive change.

It is often not acknowledged (although Drescher did) that the challenges in the UK from the 1980s onwards, came from psychoanalytic psychotherapists and analysts outside the BPC. UKCP psychoanalytic organisations scrutinised their policies and trained many LGBTQ+ psychotherapists. One particular protest, the Socarides affair in 1995, revealed the degree of ignorance and fear amongst even liberally minded psychoanalysts and psychotherapists within the BPC (or its forerunner), who did not dare participate for reputational and patronage reasons. The omertà-like state of British mainstream psychoanalysis at that time

prevented any critical discussion of prevailing theories and attitudes, or of the Kleinian heteronormative.

**“although the BPC is making a decisive break with the past, the earlier theories, blind spots and unconscious homophobia are still with us”**

The conference showed the complexities of trying to deal with the legacy of this toxic history, its still invasive influence, whilst also working within the psychoanalytic sphere. As Leezah Hertzmann said, although the BPC is making a decisive

break with the past, the earlier theories, blind spots and unconscious homophobia are still with us. The recent experiences of the three trainees who spoke illustrated this vividly. Hertzmann pointed out how vigilant many LGBTQ+ patients often are as to the therapist's attitudes and understandings, picking up nuances that the therapist may be unaware of. The toxic past is like an unwelcome introject, it cannot simply be “moved on from” without, as a delegate suggested during the plenary, a complex process of mourning on the part of all parties. The conference was part of this process but more is needed.

It was apparent that the Statement of Regret was a very hard-won compromise. It appeared to be the product of much internal struggle at the BPC, a kind of patched over unity. We were not enlightened as to the parameters of this struggle, and I wondered why it is so important to preserve this “unity”? Some

delegates wondered if something was being protected. Laying out the grounds of disagreement would have been informative and would counter the historic lack of transparency. No one elaborated on this. We do not know why the denial and/or ignorance about past damage done is still so persistent.

The “statement of regret” did not include anything about transgender – an omission much criticised and deplored in discussions and break out groups. The talk by Drescher and other contributions (especially that of Tim Kent) meant that in the conference as a whole the complexities and challenges that transgender poses to a normative psychoanalysis and its institutions were very present, but we did not learn why it was left out of the statement.

**“Cashman’s talk was an important reminder of the trauma that so many LGBT people carry with them”**

Lord Cashman’s talk, welcome for its personal intensity and rueful humour, dwelt vividly on the crippling effects of

shame and self-denigration as a result of homophobic environments, and of the hugely damaging sense of not being lovable that he carried for much of his life. Despite many external social changes, we still need to remain aware of the insidiousness of internalised shame and the defences against it. Cashman’s talk was an important reminder of the trauma that so many LGBT people carry with them, something often overlooked. In the plenary, Damian McCann emphasised the corrosive effects of shame and its accompanying anxiety, and suggested that shame was present in the unconscious of the conference. Others such as Konstantinos Vlachakis emphasised the role of shame in leading to complex trauma, and that a rebalancing of the attributions of shame was needed, so that some of it was held by the analyst or the organisation – rather than, as Alice Kentridge suggested, being projected or disavowed defensively.

Leezah Hertzmann raised the very apposite question of where now? She argued that alternative theories were not needed to supplant the old ones, but suggested instead features of what sounded like good analytic practice. These include dispensing with questions of causality – the how rather than the why; privileging the patient’s language, their experiences and the internalised consequences of the social context; not imposing theory

too readily; above all paying extensive attention to counter transferences, biases and blind spots which may well suggest inadequacies in heteronormatively based trainings and analyses. She also emphasised the importance of understanding the complexities of homophobia, its external sources and forms of internalisation, the defensiveness and shame it may occasion and the ensuing splits.

Hertzmann criticised the frequent avoidance of eroticism, the too ready reduction of homosexuality to the pre-genital or mother/baby dynamics, and the absence of any notions of oedipal homosexualities – something also mentioned by one of the trainee speakers. She argued that the responsibility for forging better forms of psychoanalysis with sexually and gender diverse patients lies very squarely with the analyst’s capacity for listening to rather than listening for, and a self-reflective attitude to all forms of homophobic, heteronormative and cis-gender biases that may be in play. Mary Hepworth also advocated a more modest, sensitive and listening approach, as well as dropping the idealisation of psychoanalysis that can lead to arrogance. In psychoanalytic terms these suggestions are not rocket science, but basic good practice. The question of why this has been so lacking is still one we need to discuss as part of an informed history of

psychoanalysis, to provide context for the present and future.

The discussion of their own experiences by three recent LGBTQ+ trainees was a refreshing and heartfelt reminder of the importance of attending to what is happening now within trainings, especially with the growth of non-binary forms of identification and sexual fluidity, as well as the big changes in social mores. Often queer trainees felt positioned as “difficult”. There was a general sense that older theories still got in the way and that the patients’ subjectivity is not sufficiently at the centre; also that unhelpful binaries are still at play, and that there is often suspicion of gay sex. It was felt that change has been made very grudgingly, with much organisational resistance – and this was felt to take a toll on trainees, all three of the speakers having needed to take a break in their trainings. Jack Drescher said that fitting patients to theories, and seeing those who questioned theory as “difficult”, often resulted in a kind of submissiveness within organisations. His final statement in the plenary was that metapsychology in this area has been the language of oppressors, and not using it may be a better way forward.

*Joanna Ryan, co-author with N O’Connor, Wild Desires and Mistaken Identities: Lesbianism and Psychoanalysis (1993, 2003)*



## Sexuality

# Same-Sex Couples Holding Hands

*Experiences of Homophobia and Internalised Homophobia*

**Poul Rohleder, Julie Walsh and Róisín Ryan-Flood**

**W**alk down a UK high street, sea-side promenade or country lane, and you are likely to come across a couple, male and female, holding hands while they walk. This simple expression of affection is done without much thought, and typically does not draw much attention.

For same-sex and queer couples, however, holding hands is seldom a carefree, casual gesture.

Published research has shown that homophobia has a damaging effect on many gay, lesbian and bisexual people's mental health, with epidemiological studies showing higher rates of depression,

anxiety and suicidality as compared to adults identifying as heterosexual (Semlyen et al., 2016).

## **The sense of being “other”**

The sense of being ‘other’ is both an external experience as well as an internal one. Negative and hostile homophobic and heteronormative views are introjected and incorporated into the self, resulting in what we know as internalised homophobia and shame (Rohleder, 2020).

Internalised homophobia has also been understood to impact on relationships and intimacy, where the partner that is desired (of the same sex) is also a reminder of the desire that may evoke feelings of shame (Hertzmann, 2011).



In order to explore the impact of homophobia and internalised homophobia on same-sex relationship partners, we researched the experiences and thoughts of LGBT individuals about holding hands with their partners in public. Funded by the British Academy, our research was conducted between May 2020 and July 2021. We took a psychosocial approach in our research, to explore not only reported external, social experiences of homophobia or acceptance, but also internal

psychological experiences of anxiety, uncertainty and/or pride.

We interviewed 27 individuals, with a range of sexual and gender identities. People were invited to produce three or four images (photos or drawings) that captured, for them, something meaningful or symbolic of their experience, feelings or thoughts in relation to this topic.

The participants were then asked to bring the images to an interview where they

would be discussed, and the stories behind the images elicited. We invited people to reflect on their internal experience, looking externally for symbolic representation that mirrored that experience. To view a selection of the images and accompanying stories, go to our website: [www.lgbtq-holdinghands.com](http://www.lgbtq-holdinghands.com)

All participants spoke of being aware of risks for homophobic abuse, either having experienced this themselves, or knowing people who had. Participants described being called “dykes” or “faggots” by others.

### **Punched in the face for holding hands**

A few people, mostly men, described violence, such as having things thrown at them, or being punched in the face for holding hands. Meanwhile, women reported receiving sexualised responses from men, like, “Can I join in?”. Thus, the act of holding hands was described as seldom carefree, coming first with what some described as a mental “risk assessment” of the space they were in.

As a result of this actual and potential threat, many people described a feeling of internal discomfort and behavioural inhibition about holding hands with their partners in public. For example, 24-year-old James (pseudonym), who identifies as trans masculine and gay, described how he

and his male partner touch affectionately in public but in a way that is hidden.

James said:

“I remember when I was at Holborn tube station and he was behind me. I put my hand by my side and then he held it, so it was hidden, rather than being quite open. And I think the idea of secrecy adds into an idea of shame as well around holding hands [...] It’s not that we’re afraid or not proud. It’s just that we don’t want any hassle.”

“...to be able to hold her hand and not feel uncomfortable”

Similarly, Ruth, 39 years old, who identifies as a lesbian woman, talked of her struggle to hold the hand of her partner, even on their engagement day:

“She’s the only person I want to have. I want to be able to hold her hand and not feel uncomfortable. I want to be able to be affectionate, and sometimes it just really feels that I can’t.”

Ruth linked this in part to her past experience of being bullied at school for being lesbian.

Quite a few participants described a barrier between “inside” and “outside”, and a battle to make sense of and try to break through that barrier. For example, José,

45 years old, who identifies as a gay male, talked about this psychological barrier:

“I have protected my emotions and feelings about showing affection in public. I learnt to build a set of protective strategies to keep safe my heart and mind. I built an armour, and I learnt I had to keep any kind of public displays of affection in private. To me it’s like a prison or something like that.”

Participants reported differences between themselves and their partner about the level of comfort about holding hands as a same-sex couple in public. When feeling exposed or anxious, the more uncomfortable partner would drop the hand of their partner, resulting in a moment of sadness or even tension between the couple as they tried to make sense of the different levels of discomfort. One partner would question whether the other was ashamed of them and their same-sex relationship.

Of course, where people are matters. The appropriation of public spaces as “Queer Spaces” have become important for the expression of identity. Such safe spaces become a necessary place of respite and refuge for LGBT people, due to hostility in the “outside” world. In a city like London, Soho is such a space, and this place was frequently mentioned by participants as a place where they could more freely express

their love. But their experiences were starkly different outside of such safe spaces.

Our study shows how homophobia continues to structure LGBT people’s everyday experiences and internal psychosocial processes. Neoliberal narratives of equality in a country like the UK obscure such everyday hostilities and internalised oppression.

*Poul Rohleder, psychoanalytic psychotherapist in private practice, honorary senior lecturer at the Department of psychosocial and psychoanalytic studies, University of Essex,*

*Julie Walsh, psychoanalytic psychotherapist and senior lecturer at the Department of Psychosocial and Psychoanalytic Studies, University of Essex, and*

*Róisín Ryan-Flood, professor of sociology at the University of Essex, and director of the Centre for Intimate and Sexual Citizenship.*

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## Sexuality

# Bisexuality as Lived Experience and its Relevance to Psychoanalysis

**Esther Rapoport**

**A**mong the foundational concepts of Freud's theory, bisexuality has received relatively little critical attention, and is often used by contemporary psychoanalysts in much the same way as it was in Freud's time. This continuation is despite far-reaching changes in social sciences and psychoanalytic understanding of gender, sexuality and psychological development.

Darwin (1871/1936) described the increased differentiation between the sexes as one of the mechanisms of evolution. As humans developed, male and female sexual organs became differentiated and specialized in function. Yet both sexes

retained atavistic features associated with the other sex. This notion of primordial hermaphroditism, or bisexuality, as it came to be called, became highly influential among late nineteenth-century biological scientists (Angelides, 2001).

Although Freud, along with a few others, extended the biological notion of bisexuality into the psychic sphere, psychic bisexuality, for him, forever remained secondary to the essential features of human physical development; a manifestation of biology in the psychological realm. With the concept of gender as distinct from biological sex not yet articulated, having the physical characteristics of both sexes was

“naturally” understood to entail having the psychic characteristics of both genders.

## **Freud's concept of bisexuality remained remarkably overinclusive**

Among Freud's best-known contributions to the theory of sexuality, his distinctions between instinct and aim, and between sex, psychic identification and object choice, paved the way for a more nuanced and less biologically determined understanding of sexuality.

By contrast, Freud's concept of bisexuality remained remarkably overinclusive as well as inextricably linked to biology. It referred simultaneously to disharmonious or shifting gender identity, dual attraction, and the universal sexual ambiguity of human anatomy. Not surprisingly, a concept that was so loaded “embarrass[ed] all enquiries into the subject” (Freud, 1940, p. 188).

In most of Freud's writing, bisexuality is construed as the deeper truth of human sexuality that is, however, impossible in practice – at least not for modern humans.

After Freud's death, analytic writers of various persuasions remained attached to the view that bisexuality is an innate, universal human characteristic. Unlike

a mature sex/gender role or object choice, which are seen as developmental achievements, bisexuality was seen as a primary, undifferentiated condition.

## **Psychic bisexuality – erasing gender and theorising bisexual people out of existence**

In contemporary psychoanalytic discourse, the bisexuality-as-primitivity trope is no longer as prevalent but the idea of “psychic bisexuality” is still highly influential. Within the concept of psychic bisexuality, the biological concept of sex and the sociological concept of gender are not differentiated.

So the idea of “psychic bisexuality” relies on the assumption that there are only two genders and that the meaning of masculinity and femininity are fixed across culture and generation. Meanwhile, “psychic bisexuality” also implies that going outside of what's prescribed for one's gender means borrowing from the repertoire of the “other” gender.

In other words, psychic bisexuality collapses gender and sex, ignoring what social studies have taught us about the ways in which children internalize gender norms through socialization, and essentially undoes the idea of gender as



determined by social forces rather than biology.

In addition to conflating gender and sex, continued use of “bisexuality” to connote bigenderism contributes to the invisibility of people who identify as bisexual and/or practice bisexuality. This invisibility is severe enough to begin with, negatively affecting the physical and mental health of bisexual people as well as the availability of services for members of this community (San Francisco Human Rights Commission Report on Bisexual Invisibility, 2011).

While psychoanalysts were busy trying to theorize bisexuals out of existence, bisexual theorists have been attempting to do just the opposite – namely, to conceptualize the particularity of bisexual experience. These theorists have described bisexual subjectivity as a shifting, dynamic stance towards sexuality, identity and life; one that is specific rather than universal, yet not categorical and fixed in the ways in which identities (including bisexual identity) are fixed. Psychoanalysis has much to learn from this theorizing.

### **What is bisexual subjectivity?**

What is bisexual subjectivity? Susan Feldman describes it as a particular way of relating to the limits of symbolic identity. The bisexual subject, Feldman suggests, does not disavow these limits – in other

words, she does not buy the idea that her sexuality can be fully and adequately covered by an identity label such as “woman”, “lesbian”, “heterosexual” or even “bisexual” - but rather acknowledges and eroticizes the regions in which meanings collapse, because the existing cultural categories fail to mirror the subject’s experience (Feldman, 2009). No one is fully and inalterably a “man” or a “woman” and some people do not fit either.

In the spirit of Winnicottian thought, bisexual subjectivity can be understood as a particular stance towards one’s erotic and romantic life, predominantly playful and curious rather than instrumental or security-seeking, and focused on experience and process rather than predetermined visions or goals. Bisexual subjectivity doesn’t shut off potential and relates to sexed bodies, one’s own and others, as transitional objects with both-and qualities rather than stationary objects with set, essential properties (Rapoport, 2019).

### **Epistemologies of the fence**

Another question that bisexual theory has taken on is the question of bisexual epistemology: in what ways can bisexuality – in its contemporary sense, of bisexual practice – be a gateway to knowledge? Bisexual epistemologies, articulated by bisexual theorists, have been collectively named “epistemologies of the fence”.

This term is a tribute to, as well as a means of establishing a differentiation from the queer theorist Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *epistemology of the closet* (Pramaggiore, 1996). The metaphor of the fence refers to an accusation often hurled at bisexuals, implying that bisexuals are “fence-sitters”, unable to choose between homo- and heterosexuality. Bisexual “epistemologies of the fence” emphasize openness to possibilities and experiential learning.

The metaphor of the fence, Pramaggiore points out, is a rich one. While used to limit spaces and create divisions, a fence is a “permeable and permeating structure” (p. 4) and as such, very different from a more solid barrier, like a wall or a state border. Separated by nothing but a thin fence, split notions can begin to soften up. As clinicians, we can perhaps associate to the barriers patients, and ourselves, erect in the consulting room, fearing intimacy and dependence, and to the sense of relief, hopefulness and satisfaction we feel as very thick barriers gradually come to be replaced with more permeable ones.

Psychoanalytic practice informed by bisexual epistemology and open to engaging with the bisexual subjectivities of both patient and analyst can be a way for the dyad to loosen the grip of oppressive social norms and to approach moment-to-moment embodied experiencing – another royal road to the unconscious.

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## Sexuality

# The Discursive Legacies of Sexuality in Psychoanalysis and Group Analysis

**Daniel Anderson**

I feel privileged to be asked to write an article for *New Associations*, especially given the current, and sometimes controversial, debates in how we understand sexuality and gender within an analytic context. This privilege is made even more pertinent in my mind given that I am writing as a group analyst (and a BPC registrant), having recently published my book about sexuality and group analysis, *The Body of the Group* (2021).

Before I begin to describe sexuality and (trans)gender from a group analytic context I feel it is also important to describe something of my personal context for writing this article and the preceding book. It was born within an experience of training as a group analyst that was

fundamentally transformative, but it also left me with questions about the nature of the discourse I was being trained into. It was also born within a context of working alongside the BPC's advisory group on sexual diversity, aptly chaired by Juliet Newbiggin.

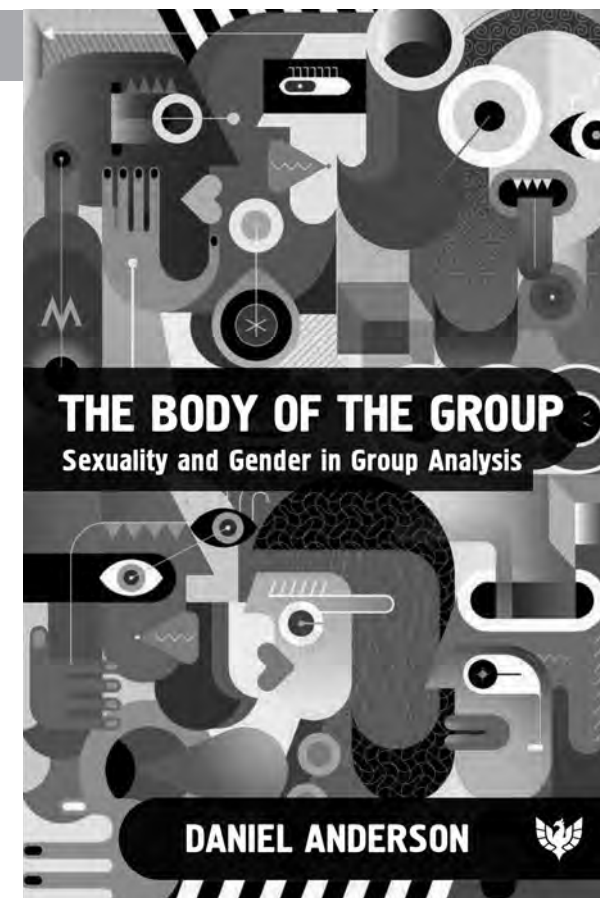
Two of the early tasks of that group when I was attending it were to create the bibliography on sexuality that Wayne Full led on, and to contribute to the initial production of the seminal *Memorandum of Understanding*. I do emphasise the word "seminal" as, although it rightly has its critics, it is a document that for me at least stands up for the rights of those who identify as a sexual or gender minority and attempts to protect them from harm. In this regard, it has started to give a voice

**“how we understand sexuality and gender within an analytic context”**

to those that have not so far had a voice beyond that which was spoken for them; that your sexuality or gender is a problem to be corrected.

It was from there that I took the training experience into a PhD to consider from a historical perspective the idea of a psychosocial psyche, and how “homosexuality” failed as a medico-legal term. We have started the process

of letting the word “homosexuality”, at least as a medico-legal entity, fail and morph into a broader view of psychosocial sexualities. I found myself curious about historical legacy and how to position that within time, including the here-and-now. I was also curious about the legacy of the relationship between psychoanalysis and group analysis that is both intimate and complicated, and shaped the vocations they are today. For example (and arguably),



psychoanalysis had its birth in sexuality with Anna O. Group analysis came from psychoanalysis during World War II through S. H. Foulkes; not from sexuality, but from aggression, hatred, and trauma. It is here that I wondered about the creative and destructive aspects of sexuality, normative desires, and the discrimination of the non-normative other.

The second part of my research was about creating a dialogue with other social theories (feminism and queer theory in particular) by using the group as a so-called “figuration in action”. There is a rich literature in both feminist queer theory and group analysis about figurations and yet, in my experience, they have generally remained walled off from each other until recently. I became curious about how we might subsequently re-read case vignette material in the group analytic literature through a queer lens and re-consider reading lists in training curricula that discursively produce group analysts by using this dialogue. It became a task that placed anti-discriminatory practice at the centre of an idea of training and which became the lens through the training was alternatively viewed.

We clinicians and academics, whether as counsellors, psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, or group analysts, are not beyond politics and ideology. We are as prone to prejudice such as homophobia

and transphobia as anybody else in our societies, whether that be conscious or unconscious. The unconscious here refers to the unconscious discursive production of notions of psychopathology and normativities. I find analytic groups are particularly efficacious at disentangling, or at least decentering, such positions through multiple voices that speak to such ideas. The power of the analytic group in this regard is not the knowledge of the group analyst, but in the de-centering of the power and authority of the group analyst by the fellow group analysts through “group polyphony”: the multiplicity of the perspectives and voices in the group. As a collective, they have the power to question and be curious of whatever words are used in the analytic group by the other as well as be intimate and vulnerable to and with each other. By doing so, they challenge assumptions and apparent norms in ways that professionals might struggle to achieve so directly. The group analysts are powerful vehicles for enabling creative failure.

All political projects fail ultimately; they move on in time and morph, sometimes slowly and sometimes abruptly, into new ideas. We are in the middle of such a movement now in terms of how we understand sexual and gender minorities. What I have found profound within the analytic group is its ability, through the

skill of the group analyst, to contain the failure of ideas and to contain unknowns. By unknowns I am referring to gaps in knowledge and experience where even words sometimes fail; the pivotal example being my briefly described discussion about the word “homosexuality” where other aspects beyond psychopathology and normativity come to the fore. Creative processes in the social unconscious become pertinent to help us resolve the vacuum and find new words.

This is where I find the “body” from “the body of the group” to be a powerful trope, in that it represents that which cannot be said but can nonetheless be experienced when in a group through multiple bodies sitting closely but without touching. This article however is not an idealisation of analytic groups by any means. The containment of such failures and gaps is no easy task. It requires an appreciation of history and a full conscious acknowledgement of the whole range of experiences within historical accounts. In this regard understanding the potential harm that psychoanalysts and group analysts have incurred to those who identify as a sexual or gender minority is crucial, but painful and shaming.

The beginnings of change however have started through the recent PP Now conference on *Sexual Diversity and Psychoanalysis* that I attended. The

highlight for me was hearing the heartfelt experiences of our trainees. The Statement of Regret, although limited, has invited a way forward but there is much to do especially regarding transgender, which was omitted. It is a slow process of change to acknowledge the multiple and insidious past and ongoing injuries that are evident throughout much of the literature within psychoanalysis and group analysis. I do not write this statement as if we should abandon our histories and legacies, but they should be consciously embraced and acknowledged as part of the reparation going forward to ensure we have analytic professions fit for purpose in the 21st century.

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## On the ground

# Creative Thinking within New Boundaries: An outdoor therapy service

**Katarina Horrox**

**P**sychotherapists, psychoanalysts and counsellors have been working in settings outside of the traditional consulting room for many years: in prisons, refugee centres and homeless accommodations, to name a few. From the Spring of 2020, many more therapists were compelled to make transitions into alternative settings, perhaps with less-than-ideal conditions for their therapeutic work. Although therapies continued to take place within clearly defined frameworks of time, place, ethical considerations etc., the change of work settings arguably stirred new encounters with boundaries that stimulated creative thinking of a new and different sort (Stokoe, 2020).

In outdoor therapy, where the therapeutic frame is transposed into a natural environment, this commonly offers different encounters with boundaries and

challenges which need to be responded to with thought. However, there is an enrichment to be had in the encounters with and within the natural world.

For meaningful therapies to take place outdoors, it is necessary to find ways of establishing a secure-enough frame that allows the client to have a relative sense of safety in an environment that can be unpredictable. In the outdoor therapy service where I work, which offers outdoor therapy to “hard-to-reach” young people and ex-service personnel in Scotland, our team has spent much time reflecting on the meaning of safety and how to build a frame in natural environments. Part of this means being aware of the client’s prior relationships to outdoor environments and how this may impact on their experience (Santostefano, 2008). Therapists may also work to construct a spatial frame through the natural elements, perhaps by



marking a boundary via a row of trees or a stream. In contracting, a therapist would explore the issue of confidentiality and discuss with the client how to manage if there were unanticipated interruptions. Transparency around risk is important and, where possible, the therapist would already know the physical terrain in advance of the sessions.

As Martin Jordan suggests (2015), when working in this context it is necessary for therapists to have the capacity to hold the therapeutic frame internally. From my own experience, I would propose that it is

helpful for therapists to feel sufficiently confident to be able to sustain the varied challenges that they may encounter, from the environment, from the client, or from some unexpected eventuality. The therapist must also feel sufficiently held and supported by their external holding bodies, through their supervision and through their wider organisation (Stokes, 1995). The therapist should not only be trained and qualified as a therapist, but also perhaps in outdoor facilitation, and be competent in outdoor first aid (Richards, Hardie & Anderson, 2019). If the therapeutic frame is experienced



as sufficiently safe and stable, then it is possible to work creatively and beneficially with the encounters that may arise within the boundaries.

The following offers a brief illustration of a therapeutic encounter (through a composite case) to illustrate the kind of work we undertake with, and within, the boundaries of an outdoor frame.

A young man was referred to the outdoor therapy service because he was struggling with serious difficulties. He had been taken into care at the age of two and was then adopted as a child. He had been sexually abused during his adolescence by a family member. The therapy sessions took place in the fields and woodlands around the village where he lived. Initially the young man walked chaotically across the landscape, choosing different paths, seemingly without having a particular direction in mind. The therapist worked hard to keep up both physically and relationally, it was hard to match the young man's pace and it was difficult to hold a dialogue. On reflection, the young man could observe how this frenzied walking allowed him to maintain a safe distance from the therapist and from the therapy. At this point the therapist's emerging countertransference was characterized by a sense of uselessness and of not feeling contained, particularly when the fluctuating routes made it harder to

manage the time boundary. This, however, allowed the therapist and client to begin to think together about the young man's experience of not having been kept safe. It was as if he could observe and experience his embodied response to the anxiety of not feeling safe – which was to distance and defend himself through intense and chaotic walking, making it hard for the therapist to keep up and engage with him.

As the regular outdoor sessions continued, he was able to settle into a different, calmer and more regular rhythm. He began to take the same track each week, leading to an enclave in a forest. This part of the forest was familiar to him so, in a sense, he had invited the therapist into a part of his (childhood) world, into a place and psychic space that already had meaning for him (Britton, 2003). In the forest he would slow down and become more reflective. He explained that the forest afforded him a sense of safety, that the canopy of birch and beech, with its dappled light filtering through the leaves, offered a feeling of containment and perspective that he did not experience elsewhere. This environment seemed to encourage him to be more able to remember, explore and imagine.

On one occasion, as he spoke of the sexual abuse for the first time, he chose a completely new path within the forest. He began scrambling through the

undergrowth and the therapist followed as he climbed between bushes, ducked under branches and scraped past bramble. The thorny uncomfortable scramble felt apt, perhaps an embodied expression and symbolic representation of his wish to move through and away from these painful memories. As he and the therapist arrived at the edge of the forest, bordering onto a field, he stopped abruptly and did not want to go on. Together they could reflect that beyond the forest, with the landscape opening up, it felt less safe for him, that “the world” did not feel secure. They sat down on a log and he began to talk more openly about the impact of the abuse on himself and the subsequent breakdown of his family. Perhaps the embodied experience of moving in this exploratory way within the “safety” of the environment helped some thinking to emerge.

Afterwards, he did not want to accept a plaster for a cut that he had received from the bramble. They were able to think together about how the gesture of being offered a plaster for an actual concrete wound had painful and complex meanings for him. Still later, as the session came to an end, he was able to request some water from the therapist. Perhaps a small shift had taken place in his mind.

Hopefully this brief therapeutic encounter illustrates how, when the environment is

worked with sensitively and thoughtfully, there are elements to be gained by moving the frame to an outdoor setting.

All references to clients have been anonymised.

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## Review

# The Shudder in the Room

An exhibition of works by the Turner Prize winning artist and cultural activist Lubaina Himid explores concealed aspects of history and everyday life.

## Ambrose Hogan

Lubaina Himid, *Le Rodeur: Exchange*, 2016

I was first drawn to Lubaina Himid's exhibition at Tate Modern by a sense that the language of her paintings evoked the dream-like worlds of Paul Delvaux (whose surrealism is sometimes said to have been influenced by psychoanalysis) and I had thought that this theme might be interesting to readers of this journal. My association with dreams and the unconscious came from looking at *Le Rodeur: the Exchange*, a painting which is used in much of the publicity for the exhibition. It depicts someone proffering a strip of decorated material to a couple: the woman has a bird's head, the man is caught in a moment of decision. It seems dream-like, but the narrative that lies behind the image – the story of the slave ship *Le Rodeur* – is a

nightmare. In 1819, during the Middle Passage, an outbreak of an unknown and blinding eye infection led to the crew of the ship casting thirty six people over the side into the Atlantic Ocean – damaged goods, they were worthless and to be disposed of (FitzGerald, 2021). Himid's sequence of large-scale, disturbing and yet beautiful canvases create personalities for the unnamed slaves, capturing (as she puts it herself) both the “horror of the incident but also the dread of losing sight, especially as a visual artist” (Mills, 2017). This art then becomes less about the recreation of an historical incident than about “describing that feeling of confusion, of not knowing exactly what is going on, trying to convey the ‘ghost’ of it all, the shudder in the room” (ibid.).



## “correcting the racism that suffuses the art-lover’s gaze”

My original fantasy of a connection with surrealist ideas of the unconscious thus turns out to have been exactly that – my fantasy. In what some might call a synchronicity and others a mere coincidence, the artist herself was in the exhibition the day I visited, and I was

able to enter into a conversation with her about her work. Memory, not dreams, she told me, were the likely lures and spurs to some of the scenes she presented. Her work was, at least in part, about revealing that which is hidden, about connecting with the forgotten histories and meanings of things. Imagine, she said to me, something you might find in an Oxfam shop, a second-hand drawer with a spot of ink on the paper lining, something that triggers a memory – your own, or a glimpse into another person’s – and takes you somewhere else.

*Continues on page 27*

These are reflections that are likely to resonate with the readership of *New Associations*, as will her expressed hope that the show might help people to make choices. In the accompanying book, she tells the curator Michael Wellen that she hoped that the exhibition would “encourage a person to do something that they were hesitant about . . . maybe to send a letter, or try a new food. To take an action, to make a step – no matter how small – that could possibly change their circumstances” (Wellen, 2021, p. 9). So it is that many of the works – *The Operating Table* (2019), *The Button Maker* (2020), *Three Architects* (2019), *Stir Until Melted* (2020) – catch their subjects in moments of decision, looking “slightly awkward”, at that “point of making important decisions in their lives” (Himid, 2021, p. 71). And, as it happens, these subjects are for the most part Black.

This issue – Himid’s engagement with issues of Race and ethnicity – was a second attraction for me. Her work has foregrounded Black Britishness since the early 1980s, first at the margins and then with greater and greater acclaim, and is part of a slow process which is correcting the racism that suffuses the art-lover’s gaze. As well as the sequence of paintings about the horror on *Le Rodeur*, Himid’s oeuvre deals with the simple facts of what it is to be Black and British: the legacies of

slavery, migration, Empire. In the second room, the visitor meets a fabulously playful maquette for a series of pavilions for Liverpool. These take the shape of wittily ornamented jelly moulds – decorated with light-hearted images of fantasy, or motifs from African art. It makes you smile. The kicker comes with the realisation of the significance of the jelly-mould leitmotif: jelly is linked to sugar, and anything connected to sweet sugar is covered in the sticky, sickly fingerprints of slavery.

**“It’s playful,  
life-enhancing,  
and wickedly  
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Englishness”**

A third lure for me was how the exhibition was trailed as “theatrical” – Himid has a life-long interest in theatre and opera (her initial training was in theatre design). In this regard, I wasn’t quite sure what to expect from the show. Would there be a room of set designs? Or workbooks and portfolios on display? As it happens, the gallery itself takes on a theatrical quality,

something like her dream of creating “an opera set that was actually artworks”, a space that might on occasion be filled with a live performance, but in which for most of the time “you would be the protagonist” (Himid and Pollock, 2021, p. 16). So it is that in the third room – *Blue Grid Test* (2020) – Himid and her collaborator Magda Stawarska-Beavan offer us a soundscape as well as plastic art: structured around an evocative band of blue that runs around the edges of the room, forming a “time-line” that links a deconstructed piano, parts of a banjo, extracts from newspapers. Together with the looped sounds, the installation is both a meditation on and a critical deconstruction of cultural encounter.

I cannot end this brief review without mentioning the fabulous *A Fashionable Marriage* (1984-6), composed of a series of life-size cut-out figures originally conceived so that the visitor can both move around and interact with them (though they are behind a protective rope in this show). The figures are derived from Hogarth, and in Himid’s rendition they raise issues around history, representation, sex, sexuality and race. It’s playful, life-enhancing, and wickedly politically subversive of complacent notions of Englishness. Perfect for these times in which we have to cope with the fact that Handel – as well as helping foundlings and orphans and

writing some glorious arias – invested heavily and knowingly in the slave trade (Hunter, 2015).

Lubaina Himid runs at the Bankside Tate Modern, London, until 3 July 2022.

*Ambrose Hogan is a Scholar of the British Psychoanalytic Council and a lecturer at the UCL Institute of Education. His research explores how psychoanalysis can help teachers understand the day-to-day practice of teaching in schools.*

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## Review

# Northern Sights

*The Phallogical Museum in Iceland is definitely worth a detour.*

## David Mann

Iceland has many natural wonders: the midnight sun in summer, the Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis) in winter; erupting volcanoes and the biggest waterfalls in Europe. But a recent holiday there revealed that possibly its strangest sight is human made: the Icelandic Phallogological Museum, or “Penis Museum” as it is colloquially called, located in the capital city, Reykjavik. It claims to be the only one of its kind in the world.

Jung once famously quipped that the penis is itself a phallic symbol, which is true. But as Freud did not quite say: ‘Sometimes a penis is just a penis’. Although history does not record what Sigurour Hjartarson, founder of the Phallogological Museum, thought about this, he started collecting them in 1974. Beginning with all the male species on Iceland, then assembling specimens from across the world, including

a camel, African elephant, and a baboon, the museum now has 283 penis examples in its collection. There is also a collection of penises purportedly from mythic creatures like Trolls, Elves and something called a Njardvik Growler – a monstrous ape-like humanoid in Icelandic folklore. It should be said that the museum is well worth the entrance fee – both educational and fun, serious and strangely humorous at the same time.

**“the museum now has 283 penis examples in its collection”**

Given the unitary function and single purpose of these penises, that is to say, whatever the animal, these penises are all doing the same thing and are all organs for male procreation, they still come in a



variety of shapes and sizes. Not that size should matter, but the exhibits range from the minuscule hamster penis bone (2 mm) to only the top portion of an enormous sperm whale penis, which would be 16 feet when intact. Each exhibit has a description explaining the mating and sexual habits of the animal.

## **"Some of the exhibits are close to the macabre"**

Some of the exhibits are close to the macabre. For example, fifteen silver penis castings from all the members of the 2008 Icelandic handball team who won a silver medal in the Beijing Olympics. Under a picture of Michelangelo's *David*, there is a human donation from the deceased mountaineer, Paul Arason. And just in case you are left wondering, that of *David* is more aesthetically pleasing. Indeed, there are written pledges displayed from another five men offering to donate their penis at a later date, presumably when they feel they will no longer require one.

There is something very phallogocentric about the idea of a Phallogological Museum. There is also something very part-object about the museum, focusing on male sexuality as just a penis. Then again, male sexuality is often portrayed or experienced

in a part-object way. Despite the museum's best efforts, there is a sense of something missing.

It is sex reduced to just flesh that creates a paradox: wherever you stand, you are surrounded by penises, but the museum is strikingly non-erotic, just body parts in formaldehyde. With the emphasis on the male mating organ, there is no mention of pleasure either for males or females. But then there is no reference to the other half of the procreating process: all species of female mammals have a clitoris and vagina, yet there is no mention of them in the museum. From this viewpoint, the museum's depiction of Eros is exclusively one sided. It could be suggested that this oversight reflects the dominance of male sexuality or the disappearance of the female point of view in a male dominated society. Perhaps it also reflects the exteriority of the male genital compared to the more hidden interior sexual anatomy of the female. The museum could also be said to reflect both the potency and the fragility of male sexuality: yes, an erect penis is a phallic symbol of power, but it is also vulnerable to deflation and castration, as the 283 items in the exhibition testify. There is something poignant about these symbols of emasculation, like ancient ruins that have seen better days. They have nothing of the living vibrancy of the erotic painting on ancient Greek pottery. These

erotic pictures are about sexual pleasure, not really about making babies. It is worth keeping in mind that, for humans, most sex is recreational not procreational – that is to say, most sex is for pleasure. The relationship between Eros and Psyche results in a child they call, Pleasure. We distort Eros if we forget this.

Visiting the museum made me wonder if it was even imaginable to think of a vagina museum. Why does one not already exist? How would a vagina museum be received by the public? If hosted in Iceland, Reykjavik could offer a yin and yang balance. What would such a museum be called? The Hindu word for vagina is yoni, meaning a "sacred space", so a "Yonillogical Museum"? Alternatively: the almond shaped light, totally suggestive of a vagina, the mandorla, used in some Buddhist and Christian art to surround a holy figure, could lend itself to the "Mandorlalogical Museum". Perhaps the name is less significant than the museum's non-existence which speaks volumes about the absent female voice. The very existence of a penis museum draws attention to the absence of one about the vagina.

I was left wondering what it was about the Icelandic psyche that would create such a unique museum. Most mythologies I know which feature castrated male genitals are either creation stories (Egyptian Osiris or Hindu Shiva) or are about a son usurping

his father (Cronus castrates Uranus and, in turn, is castrated by his son, Zeus). The museum, as you might expect, features Nordic mythology. One such story is very illuminating. Skadi, the patron of hunting, took up arms to avenge her father's death. The gods asked her how she might be appeased. Skadi set a challenge that somebody should make her laugh – which she thought impossible. The trickster god, Loki, then tied a chord around the beard of a goat and the other end around his testicles, and with that began a tug-of-war until Loki finally collapsed – which made Skadi laugh. I really cannot think of a penis-myth comparable to that of Loki and the goat in any other mythology. Perhaps it takes a psychology that can imagine a penis tug-of-war to then imagine and create a Phallogological Museum.

*David Mann is a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and supervisor in private practice in Tunbridge Wells and a member of the British Psychotherapy Foundation. He was previously a consultant psychotherapist for 15 years in the NHS. His book Psychotherapy: An Erotic Relationship was republished at the end of 2021.*



# Counselling and Psychotherapy Training Online and in London



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Tuition takes place on two Fridays and two Saturdays from 10am to 4pm.

**Dates:** 6, 7, 20, 21 May, plus one-to-one tutorials 6–10 June 2022.

**Venue:** Online and London W1W 6JL.

**Fee:** £550 + £50 application fee.

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11–14 July 2022

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**Trainers:** Tavistock Relationships staff.

**Venue:** Hallam House, London W1W 6JL. **Fee:** TBC.

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**Start date:** Autumn 2022 – see website for the latest details.

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