We live in a world that is target driven, the outer world. The psychoanalytic profession has become businesses, and the importance of human relationships somehow gets squeezed out and forgotten. The Francis Inquiry into the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust clearly shows how we might better understand the work that our profession undertakes and the wider contribution that psychoanalytic thinking can make to society. Five BPC task groups have started their work on informing us how we might better

- collate and communicate the evidence base for psychoanalytic and psychodynamic psychotherapy
- support and develop psychoanalytic work throughout the UK
- make the profession more accessible to people with different sexual orientations
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- integrate into wider NHS mental health services and other areas of the public sector

The task groups are getting into their stride, and the level of debate and discussion is quite impressive. We will be working with them in the next few months to develop some clear deliverables and outputs, and to ensure that we get our thinking and messages to a wider audience and start to better influence policy makers, we are employing a policy and public affairs officer, who should be in post shortly.

Our PP NOW Conference, with over 250 delegates, considered many of the issues the task groups are looking at. Kicking off the conference with the public lecture was Iain McGilchrist’s illuminating lecture on the divided brain and the search for meaning; where the target-driven, reductionist managerial approach could be seen as the dominance of left brain thinking. The following day, Professor Salman Akhtar’s keynote address elegantly brought to life the difficult and complex area of the mental pain of minorities. We were delighted to receive very positive feedback about the conference, and pages 2 to 6 in this edition of New Associations captures some of the fascinating discussions that were had. The excellence, innovation and expertise in our profession was further reflected in the PP NOW awards ceremony, where the following winners (highlighted on page 4) were celebrated:

- The City & Hackney Primary Care Psychotherapy Consultation Service (Award for Innovative Excellence)
- Sally Griffin and Stevens Flower (Award for Outstanding Professional Leadership)
- The Tavistock Centre for Couples Relationships (The Bernard Ratigan Award for Psychoanalysis and Diversity)
- Joselyn Richards (Lifetime Achievement Award)
- Ora Dresner (Special Commendation for her work at Camden Psychotherapy Unit)

Policy makers and politicians in Britain are increasingly concerned with mental health and the wellbeing agenda, but they seem to focus too closely on symptomatic relief and not on object relations. The work we do, as psychoanalytic and psychodynamic psychotherapists, can offer something much more than this symptomatic relief; helping our patients understand what led them to feel like they do and start a better understanding of themselves and, critically, their relationship with others. The work of the winners of the PP NOW Awards and many of the discussions at the conference are testament to the diversity of ideas and thinking we can offer.

The BPC are engaging with politicians and policy makers. Recently we produced parliamentary briefings and met with the new Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Mental Health, James Morris MP. We remain active members of the We Need To Talk coalition and continue to forge closer relations with partner organisations and other leaders in the mental health field. In the coming months we will be increasing our public affairs and media activity to ensure policy makers really do know what we have to offer. We owe it to society to ensure our profession’s knowledge and thinking are more widely disseminated, to help everyone understand what happens to human relationships in our increasingly insecure and individualised society.

Gary Fereday is the BPC’s Chief Executive.

‘We are a profession that understands the human condition.’

By Gary Fereday

We are in a profoundly altering political landscape. The welfare settlement and the post war social contract under radical change. Tax cuts for the wealthy, privatization of state assets, and reducing social security are all changing the role of the state as we have known it for most of our lives. Of course this change isn’t new, argued back some thirty odd years to the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979. However, the pace of change, coupled with rapidly changing technology, the internet, proliferating television channels, and the rapid expansion of new and emerging economies (and the ability for capital to be moved in seconds around the world) seem to be placing us all in an intensely insecure and individualised society.

Government policy increasingly focuses on managerial approaches to improve the efficiency and outcomes of public services. We live in a world that is target driven, with key performance indicators and league tables intended to help providers of public services improve their services and the tax payer get value for money. Yet in trying to measure everything we often seem to understand less. Increasingly citizens become consumers, public services become businesses, and the importance of human relationships somehow gets squeezed out and forgotten. The Frances inquiry into the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust clearly shows how overworked and stressed clinicians and managers, in a target-driven culture, lose sight of what really mattered.

The psychoanalytic profession has something quite profound to say about this. We are a profession that understands the human condition, the role and value of relationships, which is after all what we do. Yet we seem hesitant, shy almost, to say very much. Working privately in our consulting rooms with our clients, we sometimes appear to be a profession unsure of what we have to offer the outer world.

The BPC is leading work to ensure policy makers better understand the work that our profession undertaken and the wider contribution that psychoanalytic thinking can make to society. Five BPC task groups have started their work on informing us how we might better

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The blame or shame society

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Whistleblowing: self-interest or moral good?

Psychosynthesis and poetry

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The crucial value of minority views

By Mark Vernon

McGilchrist’s talk drew from his book, *The Master and His Emissary*. His thesis is so important because it makes the case for the crucial value of what cannot be found in the light, and does so in a form that devotees of the explicit can accept and understand. The evidence he gathers, in the shape of numerous brain studies and scans, shows that what we think and feel is, at best, only half the story – though it is the half of the story to which the modern world has become wedded.

*I What we think and feel is, at best, only half the story.*

What this offers for therapists, alongside others who sense that what is manifest is limited, is a validation of many of the assumptions with which they have been working for so long. My sense was that listeners felt that they were not learning anything radically new about the world, but they were having their understanding of the world possibly extended and profoundly affirmed.

The truth McGilchrist has understood is that neuroscience carries weight in contemporary public discourse. On top of deepening medical science’s understanding of the way the brain works, it is felt to offer new insights into what it is to be human. In fact, I’d say, the neuroscience is beginning to re-describe old insights but with the authority of a new science. The hope is not only that this will help grow the evidence base for psychotherapy, but that it will commend psychodynamic insights to those who might otherwise be inclined to dismiss the implicit.

*What the left doesn’t know*

It is, therefore, useful to have a working knowledge of McGilchrist’s thesis. His entry point is the observation that the brain is asymmetric. Its two hemispheres are structurally, physiologically and psychologically different. They see the world in different ways. In fact, McGilchrist argues, it is best to think of the hemispheres as two personalities. It often makes better sense to ask what each hemisphere is like, as opposed to how it works.

This is a crucial first step in reintroducing the world to the significance of brain lateralization, because the popular notion is that the two hemispheres do different things. This is a reductionist and false move that almost ruined the subject for serious science. Being ‘right-brained’ does not mean you are more creative or spiritual, any more than being ‘left-brained’ means you like fast cars or reading instructions. The left is not all about reason, and the right emotion. Rather, the new work shows that access to the view of things offered by both hemispheres is necessary for full awareness and a diverse consciousness.

The two-persons interpretation of brain lateralization comes from Roger Sperry, the neuroscientist who won the Nobel Prize for his split-brain research. ‘The left hemisphere is not just the reasoning, logical, analytical, left-brained half of the brain, as we’ve been led to believe’, writes Sperry. ‘It is the hemisphere that enjoys possibilities and novel, interesting, creative or spiritual, any more than being “right-brained” means you like fast cars or reading instructions. The left is not all about reason, and the right emotion. Rather, the new work shows that access to the view of things offered by both hemispheres is necessary for full awareness and a diverse consciousness.

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right offers the capacity to maintain a sustained, open engagement. If the left longs to make the world its own, the right receives. If the left conceptualizes, the right is expectant. The two are in a creative tension. Put them together and you have the brilliant result. As anyone else. We can all fall for the temptation of trusting too much in our theories and models. Believers in the scientific materialist who is wedded only to the explicit. Cautions aside, several aspects of the thesis carry implications for psychotherapy. For example, the joint action of the two hemispheres that makes for deep human awareness suggests that our richest appreciation of reality happens in between this and that view. That chimes with Winnicott’s notion of transition space as the locus within which meaning and creative expansiveness emerges. As Rowan Williams put it, in responding to McGilchrist’s talk, the gaps and silences in the therapeutic relationship are as pregnant with possibility as interpretations and things said.

Alternatively, McGilchrist’s work highlights the crucial role played by the body in therapy, because the right hemisphere is literally more connected to the body. Both hemispheres have motor and sensory connections with the opposite side of the body. But the right appears to have an excess of links and networks. The implication is that the right hemisphere carries a whole body that is intimately linked to lived, affective experience. It is vital for empathic and emotional connections with others and the world. It is the wellspring of expansive, meaningful and uncertain feeling.

So, the evening before the conference introduced us to a minority view of the world, the specialism of the right hemisphere. The next day, the conference itself turned to the experience of minorities in a less abstract sense.

‘Minorities act as a container of projections for the majority.’

The threat of minorities
Salmen Akhtar opened his presentation with a moving story, another one about a car. He remembered once finding his car had a flat tyre. Moreover, the flat occurred outside the office of his analyst. What was he to do? He reflected that he might have acted as his father would have done: called a taxi, gone home, and asked his wife to arrange for the car to be fixed. Instead, he located the car’s instruction manual and changed the wheel himself. The experience provoked mixed feelings in him – triumph, for sure, at having done a new thing in life; but also a sense of betrayal, for he had also turned his back on the ways of his father.

The resulting mental pain Akhtar aligned to Freud’s notion of seelenschmerz, or the ‘pain of the soul’. It is the discomfort or agony that arises when an individual becomes separated from a part of themself, what ego psychology might call a selfobject. This pain is borne by minorities living amidst majorities that hold more social and cultural power than themselves. It is the suffering that results from a lack of representation; or an inability to participate in the canonical narratives of a host society; or an inability to access the various cultural resources available to others with whom one lives.

Akhtar developed his ideas by discussing why minorities can become such a threat to the majority. First, there is the issue of the presence of minorities. They are, as it were, everywhere: for psychological as well as socio-economic reasons, there is no society on earth that does not contain minorities. The question, though, is whether they are unwanted or whether they are unwanted but are also a no less needed element in society.

The truth is that minorities are always needed, and are always found, because they act as a depository or container of projections for the majority. You only have to pick up a newspaper to realise that wherever you find social, economic or political tensions, you will also find minorities who are caught up in the discontent and are suffering as a result. They are targets, the subject of complaints or anger. That minorities make the majority question itself exacerbates the situation.

Invisibility and hypervisibility
The second element of Akhtar’s analysis concerned the perception of minorities. He argued that minorities are either invisible or hypervisible. There is no normal perception of them. From the point of view of an individual who is a member of a minority, the experience can be likened to speaking a second language. The speaker of a second language is not conscious of just speaking, but of speaking their new language. Similarly, they might gain the sense of not just living, but of living in their new country with all its slight or substantial differences.

Akhtar remembered how, after having moved to America, he would sometimes take a longer route home simply to pass by a house that reminded him of India.

Third is the issue of the participation of minorities. Take Independence Day in the USA. Akhtar suggested. Whose independence is being celebrated? If African Americans don’t celebrate it, they might be thought un-American. If they do, they might lose touch with a part of their history, because slaves were not freed on 4 July, 1776. The general question is this: when a festival is celebrated, whose festival is it? Probably not the minority’s.

After presence, perception and participation, Akhtar turned to the progress of minorities. He drew on Freud’s notion of ‘success neurosis’, how an individual may excel and perhaps repeatedly reach a certain level of achievement, and somehow never exceed it. Freud related the phenomenon to Oedipal anxieties, as if success is the equivalent to incest or, conversely, murder. And perhaps there are other dynamics at play, too.

Father to son, son to father
By way of illustration Akhtar told another personal story, this time concerning his son who had one day asked him about God. Akhtar felt confronted by an impossible situation. If he were to be a good son to his father, he would have to tell his son that God did not exist, because he himself was raised an atheist. However, if he were to be a good father to his son, he would have to leave the possibility of God open for his son.

Such deep ambivalences can cause people to fail to achieve their potential. The audience was invited to consider the imagery on display around their places of work; training institutions to examine the pictures on their walls. Do images reinforce ethnic norms? Do landscapes reinforce cultural assumptions? Do still lifes privilege certain values? All such...
Minority views
Continued from previous page

messages can stir up success neurosis in clients and trainees. They can disturb the going on being of an individual who finds themselves in that environment, to deploy Winnicott’s phrase. Life might then be practised as an exercise in disjointedness.

Wherever there is the pain of the soul there are two broad responses. Akhtar continued. One is regressive, into hate, anger and projection. The other is creative, the preconscious urge that inspires and transforms. Akhtar next explored the attitudes or social values that might ensure that there is more chance of nurturing the creative and containing the regressive. They revolved around safety – physically, psychically, culturally and socially. These will be fully discussed in the published version of Akhtar’s paper, due to appear in the British Journal of Psychotherapy in May 2014.

Speaking to the majoring
What does all this mean in practice? Answering this question formed the last section of Akhtar’s lecture. He insisted that prior to producing solutions to the problems faced by minorities came the restoration or provision of civil rights, an acknowledgement by the majority of the problems faced by minorities – the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post-apartheid South Africa being exemplary in this respect; an acceptance of a minority culture as a minority culture, as opposed to a culture awaiting assimilation; the creation of social iconography celebrating minorities, such as Martin Luther King Day; and above the minority itself must stand up and organise. ‘If these elements can be put in place then the pain of the soul can become less, and separateness can be healed,’ Akhtar concluded.

So what of the third minority view explored during the conference, that of the minority status of psychotherapy in a world that values the explicit, and shapes its budgets accordingly? The plenary session of the conference raised a number of issues. One speaker felt the profession needs to become more comfortable talking about money. The point was also made that living organisations are able to adapt, as John Bowlby pointed out, and so psychotherapy needs to learn to interact with professions that speak different languages; to adapt to a plural world, whilst resisting the pull of reductionism. Anger and frustration was expressed by some in the audience too.

All in all, the conference set an agenda. Engaging with the wider world is crucial, one that values the explicit more than the implicit. It is no easy task, though ways and means are emerging.

Mark Ferson is the author of ‘Love: All That Matters’ (Hodder) and ‘Carl Jung’ ( Guardian Shorts).

Breakout session: Envy and the biopsychosocial model

The biopsychosocial model posits that biological, psychological and sociological elements all play a significant role in the human condition. How does it work in practice?

It was stress-tested in a workshop that was also a kind of experiential group. The three leaders of the workshop each advocated the importance of one element in the model. ‘Mr Biomedical’ argued that he stood for the scientific method and evidence-based practice, rooted in what we know of the material nature of reality. ‘Mr Psychological’ discussed the importance of inner as well as outer life for human beings, noting that relationships are crucial too: what we need is practice-based evidence. ‘Mr Sociological’ put the case for individuals functioning within a wider environment that also has a major impact upon human behaviour and wellbeing.

The workshop then divided into three, one for each of the elements. The groups were asked to agree on non-jargon words that captured the essence of each element. In my group, at least – the psychological – this proved tricky to do.

Next, the groups were mixed up. This was when the experiential side of the workshop kicked in. What would be the reaction to different elements in the mix, and would that tell us anything about how the biopsychosocial model works in practice?

I think it did. For example, feelings of envy emerged. The psychological and sociological felt envious of the biological, because the biomedical model holds so much of the power and kudos in contemporary culture. Further, the biological showed envy for the psychological, because the latter can enjoy real human relationships.

And then there was the ‘physics envy’ the biological has of the other sciences. It is commonly imagined that physics is the precise science to which all others aspire. And yet, as any physicist is likely to admit, there is the science that undergoes routine paradigm shifts; in the twentieth century, about one every 30 years. Physicists know better than most scientists that exclusive adherence to one model is a sure route to being left behind.

Bernard Ratigan Award for Psychoanalysis and Diversify

This award applauds an individual or organisation that has significantly improved and/or developed inclusivity in psychoanalytic practice and/or therapeutic treatment. The award honours psychotherapist Bernard Ratigan, who passed away last year. Bernard was the recipient in 2010 of the award for Outstanding Professional Leadership, for his work with and advocacy for the LGBT community.

Awarded to: Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships

Over the past two years TCCR has, as a psychoanalytic institution, been involved in a fundamental process of change towards greater inclusivity of lesbian, gay, bisex and transgender couples within the organisation as a whole. Working closely with PACE, a leading charity promoting LGBT mental health and well being, TCCR was, in April 2015, awarded an ‘EQuality Chartermark’ for its commitment to inclusive practice with LGBT couples.

Special Commendation

Awarded to: Ora Dresner

In 2011, due to a complete withdrawal of funding by the NHS, the Camden Psychotherapy Unit faced the prospect of imminent closure. Over the last two years, through numerous, and still ongoing, fundraising events, and with the help of many colleagues in the psychoanalytic community, staff and trainees, CPU has managed, with great difficulty, to keep afloat. Ora leads the CPU in this mammoth task, alongside running the unit on a day to day basis.

Lifetime Achievement Award

Awarded to: Joselyn Richards

Joselyn provided outstanding leadership of the BPC, during establishment and foundation years. Partly as a result of her leadership and vision, the psychoanalytic field has been greatly enhanced and become far more cohesive and coherent. Likewise Joselyn has provided both vision and great leadership qualities over many years as a key member of the steering group in creating the British Psychoanalytic Association. She has also held many important roles within the BAP.
The ‘blame and shame’ society

By Jean Knox

The ‘blame and shame’ agenda is stoking resentment and rage among the disadvantaged in our society. Jean Knox offers hope that psychoanalytic psychotherapy can make a helpful contribution to the debate.

Of the most intractable problems all therapists encounter is shame. An understanding of each person’s unique personal history that can contribute to self-disgust and shame is vital if psychotherapists are to help their patients as effectively as possible. But we psychotherapists also need to familiarise ourselves with the social and cultural factors that undermine the capacity of parents to nurture their babies and children in a secure environment that optimises their physical, psychological and emotional development.

One such factor is the trend in today’s political culture to disparage and show contempt for any sort of frailty, disadvantage, need or dependence. It is a pernicious assault on the vulnerability that is an essential part of what makes us human, from infancy onwards. It takes many forms, but the thread running through them all is a ‘blame and shame’ attitude that misfortune or failure is something we bring on ourselves. Owen Jones, in his book Chavs, explores this ‘blame and shame’ approach in the context of class and social and economic power:

The demonization of working-class people is a grimly rational way to justify an irrational system. Denounce them, ignore their concerns – and rationalize a grossly unequal distribution of wealth and power as a fair reflection of people’s worth and abilities. But this demonization has an even more pernicious agenda. A doctrine of social responsibility is applied to a whole range of social problems affecting certain working-class communities – whether it be poverty, unemployment or crime. In Broken Britain, the victims have only themselves to blame.

(Jones, 2011, p. 185)

The same attitude of blame is evident in relation to illness, as Barbara Ehrenreich describes in her book Smile or Die. She castigates the ‘tyranny of positive thinking’, revealing the hidden agenda behind the ‘blame and shame’ culture. If people are poor because of their own failings, mental illness is simply a lack of willpower, if the sick are sick because they have done something wrong (such as smoke or drink), and if women are the victims of sexual violence because they dress provocatively, then ‘other people’ – the rest of us – can never be such things themselves. Moralising is soothing, reassuring those who are comfortable and privileged in society that they deserve this and can call it success, as though they have achieved it by their own efforts rather than because they have been fortunate enough to benefit from the social milieu into which they happened to be born.

As a final point, the ‘blame and shame’ agenda of the social elite in our society is a dangerous tool, which stokes growing resentment and simmering rage in those disadvantaged poor and vulnerable communities who are too often forced to live along the conspicuously wealthy in our cities, and experience their indifference, or fear and contempt for disadvantage. A recent Guardian article highlights this issue in New York, quoting a Brooklyn resident: ‘Take a look around you. This is Brownsville. There’s none of the pretty stuff you get in Manhattan… People here are left behind.’ This situation is dangerously mirrored in all large cities and we ignore it at our peril.

Jean Knox is a Training Analyst with the SAP and BPF.

This is where psychoanalytic psychotherapy can make a helpful contribution to the cultural debate. We can highlight the fact that vulnerability of all kinds is an essential feature of the human condition, and how central it is to each infant’s development for their absolute respect, not only by their parents but by the wider society. We need to be telling the wider world that helping a child to develop the capacity for agency, autonomy and intimacy in relationships is far more crucial for healthy psychological and emotional development than endless testing of cognitive learning skills. We need to start integrating our understanding of unconscious processes with the work of sociologists and others who can help us to think about how the real world contributes to making us feel good or bad about ourselves.

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The August 2011 riots – ‘them’ and ‘us’

By Frank Lowe

The 2011 riots were 'a wake-up call' to do something about hardship and despair at the bottom end of society. Frank Lowe asks where psychotherapists should position themselves.

The riots as index patients

There is a tendency within our society to ascribe a person's behaviour largely to personal factors (an approach that conveniently denies its links with family, community and wider societal dynamics). In my clinical experience, many young people who are referred to CAMHS struggle frequently not only with their individual problems, but also with their relationships with their families, and/or their social context. Often a young person is unconsciously bringing their family and sometimes school or society for treatment. From this perspective the young person is accurately referred to as the index patient, i.e. an indicator of a family or wider systemic problem.

The riots of August 2011 can be thought of as index patients – an index of a deep social malaise. People do not always know the full reasons for their behaviour, and in fact we tend to communicate our most unbearable feelings through projective identification. Violence can be a way of the rioters evacuating into others their unbearable experiences – creating fear, vulnerability and loss in the victim.

Understanding the reasons for the rioters' behaviour should include not only studying them and their families, but also the dynamics of the wider social context. An examination of the wider context within which the riots occurred shows the following: A global economic recession due largely to a credit bonanza driven by greed and unfettered consumerism. A government which had declared that ‘we are all in this together’, but instituted an austerity programme that placed the cost disproportionately on the poorer members of society. A country where there was already widening income inequality, stagnant social mobility and high youth unemployment, and public outrage at a number of scandals about those at the top of society seeming to be self-serving, dishonest and greedy, e.g. parliamentary expenses and banker's bonuses.

The riots could be an expression of anger about the loss of contact with good objects and a search for containment.

The rioters' behaviour can be thought of as a symbol of a malaise not just in themselves, but in society as a whole. In many ways their behaviour mirrored the greed and lack of compassion of bankers, politicians, press, in fact of all of us. The financial crisis was a product of oral greed: a widespread credit culture linked to an increasingly individualistic, narcissistic and consumerist lifestyle across the whole of society.

The riots as a communication and a sign of hope

About 75% of the rioters were adolescents aged 24 or under. Winnicott (1956) argued that anti-social behaviour is more likely to be a product of true deprivation, i.e. when ‘there has been a loss of something good in the child's experience.’ Winnicott wrote that because their request for help through anti-social behaviour is not understood, some young people become hardened, which then makes it ‘much more difficult to see (what is still there, nevertheless) the SOS that is a signal of hope in the boy or girl who is antisocial.’ However, instead of a considered response to the anti-social behaviour of those who rioted, there was a severe retaliation against them. Defendants who would normally be released on bail were being routinely remanded in custody and many of those found guilty were given disproportionately harsh sentences.

The riots could be thought of as an expression of anger about the loss of contact with good objects and a search for containment.

The riots were symptomatic of a malaise and were also an unconscious request for its recognition, and thoughtful containment.

In the early days of the riots there was an outpouring of contempt for the rioters. They were described as feral children, criminal gängs and young thugs who shared a culture of entitlement and a lack of compassion and care so that development can occur.

But where do we as psychotherapists position ourselves in our society? Should we espouse any political values whatsoever, or should we keep a low, detached professional profile? Is psychotherapy as a profession more allied to the interest of the status quo, and thus the interest of the dominant classes? And do we contribute to the splitting-off of the personal from the social? Do we contribute to improving public health and can we do more? Lynne Layton argues that there is a contemporary neoliberal subjectivity that reproduces vulnerability, and blocks awareness of the ways that we are mutually interdependent. This has led to a decline in our empathy and in our capacity to be responsible and accountable for the suffering of others. She argues that we seek refuge in identifications that puts us at a safe distance from the suffering other, and to not hold oneself accountable. Is there any truth in what she is saying – what do you think?
On not knowing very much

By Philip Birch

What’s it really like to embark on a psychotherapy training, and how does it compare to traditional academia? Philip Birch speaks up from the back of the class.

In the case discussion groups we were asked to observe strangers and report back, again, on our thoughts and feelings, but none of these seemed to be right or wrong. And in the experiential group, where there seemed to be no criteria for success or failure, I was at a complete loss. Questions were often left unanswered. There was a lot of floundering.

I’m not sure if this feeling is common for all students embarking on a new training in psychotherapy, but for anyone who has experienced other university courses it requires a shift of perspective.

The lack of immediate encouragement, straightforward guidance, being told what is right and wrong, can lead to all sorts of rather angry fantasies, such as the tutors don’t have feelings. But gradually it dawned on me that I was being asked (ever so subtly) to think in a different way to the way that had got me through school and university. I was being asked to reflect on the experience of learning, the experience of being in a relationship with someone who knew and someone who apparently didn’t. The drive to achieve a grade was present, but alongside it was another, that I had to think for myself; in other words, I had to stop thinking about what they were looking for and start thinking about why I thought like this.

In one theoretical discussion someone mentioned “negative capability”, an idea Keats coined in one of his letters to his brothers. I chung onto this concept, because I thought it made sense of what I was doing; to be “in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irresistible reaching after fact or reason,” although it’s telling that I needed a romantic poet to make me feel at home. To paraphrase Wilfred Bion, who we read a few years later, the problem with finding out answers is that you stop thinking about the questions. So we were learning what it was like to learn, to not know; a useful experience when trying to understand what is knowable only in fleeting moments, the human mind.

That’s not to say training as a psychotherapist simply taught me to endure ignorance. Of course there are facts and concepts to be learned. But I was also taught to question fact, to think about what it is for, what it might defend against and in this way to question the building blocks of people’s minds, what they so fiercely believe that it causes them problems in relationships or drives them crazy. I am reminded of a patient who believed he would rant down the phone at her, and how this fact ‘could not be thought about. In some ways my training course taught me to think like a child again, to ask the questions we are coerced not to ask, which we should all ‘know’ but which probably deserve more thought. Where do babies come from?

Springs to mind.

Alongside the academic requirements there are two other strands to a psychotherapy training: personal therapy and the clinical placement. Some trainings also require an infant observation, which I have not done.

‘It is a struggle to find placements, especially when services are being cut.’

My course asked me to be in one weekly personal therapy, and I soon discovered that this was a minimum requirement. There is a prevalent attitude, though not shared by all, that the most significant work is done in twice-weekly (or more) personal therapy, because it’s only in this situation that true regression and an intensive transference can occur. Having tried once, twice and thrice-weekly therapy I can say that there is a difference, both in terms of the intensity of the relationship and the strain on one’s bank balance. Sometimes money worries can be overlooked by a therapist, or treated as purely psychic phenomena, and this can be frustrating; but frustration can also lead to insight, which should be acted on! A comundrum I found myself tackling often. One quickly realises that there are many different ways to skin the psycho cat.

The clinical placement, that is finding a place to practice, can also be a trying experience. For many students it is a struggle to find placements, especially when mental health services are being cut, and my course didn’t help an awful lot with this. But once you are there, whether the placement is in the NHS or a private organisation, usually patients are suggested to you by a supervisor who will help you think about the challenges of working with them. Indeed, the patients will already have been assessed and thought about extensively within the service. And once a week, either individually or in a group, your supervisor will help you pick apart the dynamics of each session. So one is contained by the organisation, and the experiences all of the advantages and disadvantages this brings.

Nonetheless there comes a moment when you are thrown into a room with a patient for the first time and you are expected to... talk to them, or rather share the silence with them. It is worth remembering at this point all of the fantasies which arose at the beginning of the training course, about unfeeling therapists, as the patient may feel some of those things about you, or, depending on the flavour of their internal drama, other things. I was once told by a patient that I hated her, and at the time her sessions were the highlight of my week, which led me to conclude either I was a masochist or she was seeing something I wasn’t. For me this was the part of the training I found most interesting but which was also the most unsettling. Usually there was a figure on my shoulder who asked: are you trying to help this person or eavesdropping on their life? Sometimes it can be difficult to separate the patient’s needs from one’s own, which is why personal therapy and supervision are so important.

It is also difficult to separate out these two parts of the training from the university course, and perhaps they shouldn’t be, because in each setting I was always asked to do the same thing, to think about myself in relation to others, and interrogate my assumptions, frustrations and pleasures with something approaching objectivity, although often I needed a helping hand.

I realise this piece has shifted in tone from that of a student telling stories to a graduate doling out advice. The urge to find and give answers is still strong. But perhaps I should end by saying that these have been some of the most difficult and valuable learning experiences of my life, and for that reason fiendishly enjoyable.

Philip Birch is the DIT UK Administrator and part of the Psychological Therapies Development Unit at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. He also works as an honorary psychotherapist in East London and Camden.

THE TUTORS DON’T say very much, do they?

My fellow student, an ex-lawyer who had retired early and decided to train as a psychotherapist, was puzzled by this feature of our course. I agreed and for that reason fiendishly enjoyable.

‘But what are they looking for?’ I asked.

And they look so pissed off all the time,’ another student said, ‘stony-faced, like they don’t have any emotions.’

The group of us, five or six, in the university coffee shop, murmured agreement.

‘Maybe they’re doing it deliberately, to test us,’ another said.

‘But what are they looking for?’ I asked.

We had been on the course together, a Masters in psychotherapy, for two weeks. There were about thirty students in total, and some of us knew each other more intimately through smaller groups. There were groups for theoretical discussion, groups in which we talked about patients or clients, and experiential groups, where we sat in a room without an agenda and wondered what was going on. We came from a variety of backgrounds some of us had worked all our lives, some had university degrees, some had spent decades rearing children, some of us spoke English as a first language and some didn’t, and we ranged in age from mid-twenties to mid-sixties. But we had something in common. Initially it was our suspicions of our tutors; later we learned it was our suspicions about ourselves.

These early experiences of my training course shocked me. Apart from the stony-faced tutors, who preferred to let us meditate in silence rather than fill the void with their knowledge, I was confused by a lot of things I was asked to do. Instead of writing essays about the papers on my reading list and delivering them for judgement, as I had during my undergraduate English degree, I was asked to share my thoughts and feelings about them. Feelings, I wondered, what are we they in a theoretical discussion?
Whistleblowing: self-interest v. the moral good?

By David Morgan

FOR MANY people, the mania of fame that surrounds the more well-known whistleblowers who have spoken out, like Julian Assange and Edward Snowden, is seen to be rooted in their narcissism, and, however much they dress it up, their one day in the sun is seen — erroneously as I will discuss later — as driven by self interest. Films are made about some famous whistleblowers and their place as A-list celebrities seems assured to us onlookers. Through their disclosing acts they, rather than governments and leaders, become the important ones, it could seem to us.

But for most of the people I have seen, since becoming a consultant for WhistleblowersUK, it is a very different story.

Everyday whistleblowers, those whose names do not become public entities, experience loss, not gain, through their decision to disclose. And whatever it is that they disclose, in all the many fields these people emerge from, the whistleblowers that I have met are waiting to have — or have had — their pension rights, mortgages and jobs rescinded, their comfortable places of esteem in their communities dismantled, and, equally importantly, their comfortable places of esteem in their communities.

We expect, in Nazi Germany, Pinche’s Chile, or North Korea, for there to be hideous consequences for any perceived betrayal; we know that terrorist states do all they can to stamp out any dissent, and we like the idea that different mores apply here, that we live in a land of freedom and protection for human rights. And in comparison with the totalitarian states I have mentioned, we do of course enjoy significant freedom. But what I have discovered is how tough and suspicious our societal attitudes are to people we perceive as different, those who not only break free from our public laws and standards but who undermine all our core assumptions about the safety of our world. When a whistle is blown we all listen, and we have to decide, each and every one of us, how we react to the people who tell us things we may not want to know.

Even in Britain, criticism or threat to the social order is met, or seen as anti-authoritarian, naive, an attack on the parental authority, on the status quo. Compliance, playing the game and loyalty to one’s organisation is often seen as a sign of psychological health. In our own professional institutions a criticism of the authority of some senior strata is often construed as acting out. For example, see the article by Oul布鲁克斯 in the last issue of New Associations.

What countless famous whistleblowers discover is that the same blocks to speaking about problems, betrayals, failures and exploitation apply here in Britain just as in any totalitarian state, albeit more subtly. We bring powerful pressures to bear on those who risk speaking out.

I am thinking of people I have spoken to in the last year like the shipbuilder who discovers that his yard has been using seriously sub-standard materials is in a position to create uncertainties for himself and everyone he knows. The economic impact of a scandal to his company, already on the brink of economic collapse, would be disastrous. But he is also aware that the lives of the people whose product’s users are at risk. He goes to and is shunned by his union and bosses. But still he speaks out. He receives death threats in the post and loses his job. His health begins to deteriorate. He is accused of having mental health problems, which of course he now does and probably did before in a pre-morbid personality everyday sort of way. He goes to his MP and is told that there is no evidence. The MP and local newspapers are funded by interested parties.

The psychological profile of people who risk, and motives.

We know that terrorist states do all they can to stamp out any dissent, and we like the idea that different mores apply here, that we live in a land of freedom and protection for human rights.
the country and start anew. One aspect of social disclosure that is underestimated is the emotional fall-out that is occasioned by revealing truths that other people prefer to keep hidden. Shooting the messenger. Disclosers of uncomfortable truths can become the recipient of a great deal of hostility from a variety of quarters. Like the psychoanalyst, disclosers threaten to make something conscious and known that has either been hidden or brushed under the carpet through a range of people turning a blind eye.

There will be powerful forces ranged against the discloser in order to maintain the status quo. Disclosers threaten whatever defences, mythologies and belief systems institutions have developed to permit the behaviour that is being exposed. Revelations can be experienced by the institution and colleagues as humiliating and attacking, and others will see themselves as justified in retaliating against a whistleblower, and there may be a concerted effort to discredit or pathologise them (Alford, 2002).

Having an understanding of the group hostility to revelations that are threatening to cohesion can be of considerable use to an individual who needs to find a way to maintain their self belief at times of personal stress and marginalization. Part of this in my experience is getting help to understand the unconscious reasons for putting themselves in this situation in the first place. And that takes us to the heart of individual psychology, personal experience and unconscious motivation. Any previous emotional and psychological difficulties will be exacerbated or, if not evident before, brought to the surface. Motives and personal integrity will be publicly questioned so that through reversal and projection the institution that is being questioned can evade any sense of responsibility for wrongdoing. The discloser is therefore made to feel like the wrongdoer, arousing serious self doubt and depression.

I have realised from meeting with my patients that we often employ what George Orwell in 1984 called double-think. The psychological phenomenon behind it is called doubling. For example: you are a middle level functionalist in a bureaucracy or corporation, and you possess some truth you know does not conform to your institution’s or boss’s agenda. Doubling, splitting as I would call it as a psychoanalyst, means you can hold true to your personal morality while maintaining a separate public or institutional morality. At home you may never think to withhold truths from your family; on the job telling the truth may hurt not only your boss but your institution, your livelihood and the health and safety of your family. In such situations it is helpful to be able to hold contradictory positions to separate out your different selves and different loyalty structures. (Alford, 2002)

‘Like the analyst, disclosers threaten to make something known that has been hidden.’

Why do whistleblowers do it?

First of all, they don’t manage to double or split themselves. For them the inherent contradiction would be too great and too painful. They may fit in with Hannah Arendt’s idea of the heroic men and women, people who talk seriously with themselves about what they are doing, people who cannot double, or do double speak. They feel a compulsion to do the ‘right thing’. As one patient said, ‘I had to do it, I couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t speak up.’ They feel that they can’t choose to abide by their conscience.

The trouble is blowing the whistle separates whistleblowers from their former lives. Organisations constrained by law not to fire or retaliate against whistleblowers find a way of doing it. For example, Julian Assange is currently resident in a small office in the Embassy of a South American state in London. And a nuclear scientist after whistle blowing about security risks finds herself assigned to making copies or emptying wastepaper baskets. For the first time her reports are negatives, and she is passed over for her long awaited promotion.

Global capitalism does create problems, and it affects us all in different ways; it unites a lot of protest going on in the world – and I would include whistleblowers as one of those protests – and they are all reactions against different facets of capitalist globalisation: that is, the idea that there might be something more important in life than financial expansionism.

The power of financial clout was brought home to me very personally recently when I saw a head of a global bank who was able to spend a fortune to get his mother the best treatment in the world for her breast cancer, whilst a relative of mine with the same illness was treated in a good but under-funded NHS hospital. The former’s life was extended by several years.

We are currently confronted by further expansion of the market, creeping enclosure of public space, reduction of public services, healthcare, education, culture and increasing authoritarian power led by the buck (Zižek, 2015).

All whistleblowers are dealing with is a specific combination of factors: one economic (from corruption to inefficiency in the market itself), the other a demand that individual morality can make a stand against organisational might. How else can we fight the excesses of the market place? (Zižek, 2015.)

‘A market economy thrives on inequality so self interest will always triumph over the moral good. Think of the violent reaction to Obama’s universal health care plans’ (Zižek, 2015). Just as a whistleblower has to be viliified, lost he expose the rottenness that we accept to maintain our lifestyles that are quite often based on the suffering of others.

David Bell, in his important paper ‘PrIMITIVE MIND OF STATE’ (1996), says, ‘The introduction of the Market into the National Health Service (could be seen) within the perspective of the destruction of the Welfare consensus… the ideology of the Market and the attack on welfare-ism derives considerable support from their appeal to primitive parts of the psyche; that view dependent on vulnerability as weakness, the process originally described by Rosenfeld who termed it ‘destructive narcissism’. . . NHS reforms create fragmentation and alienation. This has led to primitive survivalism, such as competition between clinics, modalities, although a natural outcome of the process described, is proving very costly in terms of its effects on staff morale – an essential component of adequate health care delivery.’ (Bell, 1996)

Very few in the NHS have said much in the face of these changes. In fact, I think to protect our jobs we have colluded quite often with the process, to the extent that I attended a meeting towards the end of my time, where the patient had become a product. I felt like I was in Animal Farm, and again bowing to Orwell, it was becoming difficult to perceive any differences between the businessman and the health worker. They had become the same.

As the scandals of mid Staffordshire so ably disclosed by the courageous Kay Sheldon, who was described as a paranoid schizophrenic by her enemies; and even the terrible tragedy of Baby P, again brought to light by the equally courageous Dr Kim Holt; or Margo Haywood, a nurse who covertly filmed the abuse and neglect of elderly patients in an NHS hospital for the BBC’s Panorama, and lost her nursing registration for ‘breaching confidentiality’, whilst the staff who were abusing the patients where allowed to carry on working. These cases can be seen as the symptoms of this ‘thin state’, where the individual is sacrificed to market forces and the welfare state suffers (Bell, 1996).

This is clearly happening not just in the field of medicine and care of the vulnerable, but also in many other fields, such as the destruction of the legal aid service.

We are never going to be able to decipher in full the unconscious and conscious motives of those who disclose. I am not sure we need to. We can argue for as long as we like about the personal stories and pathologies of our most famous whistleblowers like Edward Snowden and Julian Assange, or my patients above. I could write case histories, and maybe will at some point, filled with the early experiences or internal conflicts that motivate later acts of brave, or foolishly or viciously, disclosure. But perhaps the most important thing we have to keep in mind is that societies who cannot tolerate disclosure and transparency are on their way to being the totalitarian states that most of us abhor. So whistleblowers may act as the conscience for us all.

References


The Freud Museum podcast lecture on ‘Whistleblowers: political psychological consequences’ is available at http://thefreudmuseum.blogspot.com

David Morgan survived in the NHS for twenty five years, up until recently Consultant Psychotherapist at the Portman Clinic. Now in private practice full time. Published/lectured recently on poetry, politics, race and is a consultant to HIV UK. See http://whistleblowersuk.org
Dear Sirs,

All of the articles exploring race and racism in the psychoanalytic world today (New Associations, Issue 12, Summer 2015) were interesting and relevant, but I was especially grateful to Onel Brooks for his powerful depiction of the experience of applying for and beginning psychoanalytic training as a black man.

The assault on Mr Brooks’s integrity was relentless, and he describes with devastating clarity the pressure to be the kind of black man a predominantly white analytic world expected to meet. There is no room here for a preconception being challenged by the meeting of something new. Mr Brooks was not allowed to be the man he was, but required to fit a view of blackness as vibrant and colourful; when he failed to do so he was accused of turning himself into an ‘Englishman’.

In the world outside it is well known that the treatment of black people in our society has a direct link to mental ill health. The analytic world is likely to be particularly sensitive to this as it sees the result of such suffering, but the analytic world has as its focus the internal world, and this it would seem leads to a propensity for turning a blind eye to the realities of black experience in a white society and of recognition of our part (I speak as a white woman) in this. Mr Brooks is a tale of ill treatment and abuse in the name of analytic rigour, and it must have led to considerable suffering on his part. That he has been able to work through these experiences of training and applying for training to the point where he can offer them to us to think about is a huge achievement as well as a brave one – many others will, as his colleague recommended, have given up thoughts of analytic training altogether.

This article and the experiences it describes raise questions about how it is that a profession, that has curiosity and the wish to understand human nature at its centre, can deny another their experience with such ease self-justification. How deeply embedded is our hatred and fear of difference that, when faced with its expression in a black man (perhaps the ultimate signifier of difference), we cannot remain open to enquiry and exploration, and resort to defending ourselves with that which we believe we already know. These questions I believe are ones we need to explore if we are not to regress to the kind of political correctness Mr Brooks describes. We want the world to be fairer, freer, or we would not have chosen this psychoanalytic path; but we too are not free from the power of wishing/seeing to conform, the fear of reprisals if we don’t, the fear of speaking up and being separated from our peers as a result of doing so, or of not making it through a training. The article illustrates some of the ways in which we control and keep the status quo at the expense of the individual. In doing so we perpetuate racial stereotypes – black and white – as we have surely confirmed for the black person that white people do not wish to be confronted by difference they have treat those who stand up and speak of what the rest of us know and do not speak of. The experiences Onel Brooks writes about here are known about and whispered in the corridors of training institutions, but are not “known” in the sense of being acknowledged, and therefore demanding action or the shame of inaction. I have found myself in the past loot to acknowledge the difficulty for black psychotherapists in entering a profession that puts internal reality at the centre, preferring to find reasons in the other for not joining. Thank you, Mr Brooks, for blowing the whistle on something that is known but can now be thought about openly.

Michelle Gedding

Dear Editor,

I was moved and upset to read Onel Brooks’s article. I was, however, not surprised to read that he was treated so badly, and I very pleased that you published his piece. Too many analysts and psychoanalytic therapists have got away with this type of abuse for far too long, to the discredit of potential trainees, the dismay of concerned practitioners and the detriment of psychoanalysis as a discipline.

My own experience of applying at a psychoanalytic institution where I was not accepted for training, was similarly bad. In the first interview I was subjected to an extraordinarily intrusive verbal examination for an hour and a half. Asked if I had personally experienced any particular traumatic events, I thought it was important to respond honestly, and admitted having been raped at the age of sixteen. This resulted in my being interrogated about my sexuality and questioned in excruciating detail about my past and current sexual behaviour.

After the interview I complained about the experience. The response was sympathetic but guarded: it sounded as if this had unfortunately been ‘yet another abusive experience’ for me. I was told that I would not be accepted for training at this point – even though my clinical experience was sufficient – because ‘something was bubbling up’ (whatever that meant), but I was strongly encouraged to re-apply.

With hindsight I should not have shared such personal information as I did in the first interview, but it did not occur to me as a keen and anxious applicant at another respected psychoanalytic training institution, where I found the sense of being acknowledged, and therefore demanding action or the shame of inaction. In doing so we perpetuate the analytic world has as its focus the internal world, and this it would seem leads to a propensity for turning a blind eye to the realities of black experience in a white society and of recognition of our part (I speak as a white woman) in this. Mr Brooks is a tale of ill treatment and abuse in the name of analytic rigour, and it must have led to considerable suffering on his part. That he has been able to work through these experiences of training and applying for training to the point where he can offer them to us to think about is a huge achievement as well as a brave one – many others will, as his colleague recommended, have given up thoughts of analytic training altogether.

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With hindsight I should not have shared such personal information as I did in the first interview, but it did not occur to me as a keen and anxious applicant at another respected psychoanalytic training institution, where I found the sense of being acknowledged, and therefore demanding action or the shame of inaction. At the time I was in an impossible bind, as I felt that to refuse to divulge personal information would be construed as defensiveness.

I was re-interviewed a year later by the same male clinician. He said he was aware that I had complained, but rather than apologising, he asked me similarly intrusive questions as before about my sexual behaviour. As I was more prepared for them I was less forthcoming, but I left feeling furious that this older man seemed to be using the opportunity to derive perverse pleasure from talking about sex in the interview. A second (female) interviewer then made it clear that I would not be accepted for training as I still did not have enough clinical experience; I pointed out that I had been told a year earlier that my clinical experience was sufficient. I then belittled the fact that I had advanced academic qualifications, implying that these were irrelevant for a clinical training.

I complained again to the institution about the abusiveness and inconsistency of the interviews, and requested that I be re-interviewed. I was told this was not possible as the interviewers were senior and respected clinicians, but that I would be allowed to re-apply in another year. I realised, rather too late, that this was not a place where I would want to train, and that I could not let myself be treated like that again. I applied to and was accepted at another respected psychoanalytic training institution, where I found the interviews to be rigorous and fair.

As I would not wish patients of mine to know these details, I am unable to publish this without requesting anonymity. Onel Brooks is to be thanked for his forthright account of his appalling experience.

Name and address supplied
Racist states of mind in institutional life

By Narendra Keval

‘Every people has its charms, its idiosyncrasies and its own special form of national idiocy.’

Vladimar Voinovich, Newsweek January 1998

I am reminded of an institutional observation many years ago that illustrates the subtlety of some of the processes I am describing. I was sitting with colleagues in a work discussion group thinking about the significance of race, when I found myself wondering about where our room was geographically positioned in the building. We were situated in the last room of the corridor of the department at the end of the building. This location of our space for thinking about this subject matter seemed significant in relation to race and culture as a lived experience was being situated unconsciously in the mind of the organisation. It spoke to something important about the struggles in the institutional life of the organisation. It spoke to something important about the treatment of the ethnic other.

‘Structural racism is a powerful ideological and emotional template.’

I am reminded of going to a conference to give a paper on racism some years ago. As I approached the reception desk, a black secretary walked towards me and politely asked me if I would put up a sign on the wall giving directions to the toilet as she was not tall enough to reach. As I obliged with her request, I began to wonder about just what we had both become caught up with in our brief interaction. I wondered whether I had been converted from a speaker to a junior in her imagination? Indeed, who or what I represented in this encounter had yet to be fathomed out. We know that race often becomes a powerful projective process, to behave according to unconsciously ascribed roles in the most subtle ways to keep oppressive social arrangements in place. These toxic states of mind appear to be deeply inscribed in the way our society is structured and functions. The problem is that we all internalise these dynamics pertaining to the treatment of the ethnic other.

I know that race often becomes a powerful ideological and emotional template that puts us all under pressures, through powerful projective processes, to behave according to unconsciously ascribed roles in the most subtle ways to keep oppressive social arrangements in place. These toxic states of mind appear to be deeply inscribed in the way our society is structured and functions. The problem is that we all internalise these dynamics pertaining to the treatment of the ethnic other.

Yet the phobic reaction in our professional community repeats the underlying dynamics of racism that desires absolute certainty in the face of what is experienced as a contamination by the inevitable complexities of life and living that ethnic diversity brings forth.

In my view, psychoanalysis and the psychotherapists are potentially vulnerable to some of these dynamics in their unwitting neglect of this complexity which enters into the experience of being with our patients in the consulting room. Understandable anxieties on the part of clinicians to explore this area is picked up by those on the receiving end, who experience an integral part of their experience being partitioned off or not sufficiently engaged with, potentially triggering deeper psychic terrors.

Moving onto my second point. If there is already a plethora of psychoanalytic thinking in this area, then surely a lack of engagement at many levels reflects a more disturbing problem underneath the defensive attitudes of defance or being stubborn? I suggest this failure to use the knowledge locates the problem in the perverse character of racism which reproduces itself institutionally.

An image comes to mind that may have some mileage. It is of a patient who is shouting and waving their arms about making a plea to be rescued whilst drowning in a lake, yet chooses not to take the lifeline offered by those at the shore. Another patient may give up the impression of taking up the offer of rescue but does nothing of the sort. Those throwing the lifeline bend over backwards, getting caught up in a sadomasochistic drama that aims to derive sadistic pleasure in thwarting the possibility of any development taking place.

This is evident in the history of racism where making others the bearers of inadequacy or inferiority led to thwarting the desires and emotional freedom of individuals, groups and societies.

Understanding these dynamics can assist our thinking about creating change in organisations without getting drawn into prescriptive or politically correct thinking. We know that these can appear to offer solutions, but often leave more fertile ground for racist practices to spring from the well of hidden resentments in the manner I have described above.

Psychoanalysis is well poised to grapple with some of the real psychic and socio-political predicaments in this area of work if it can also tolerate a scrutiny of its own subjectivity as part of a wider and complex dynamic that affects us all. It is worth remembering that historically psychoanalysis was the denigrated and segregated other, and runs the risk of re-enacting this trauma through a negation of the ethical other within its own domain. It is then given only refugee status without a home or a container, rather than integrated into a body of knowledge that digests and speaks to human experience across all ethnicities.

The real challenge ahead in the profession is our willingness to understand and work with the subtle dynamics of racism to ensure that the full diversity of human experience is metabolised by a genuine curiosity and concern. This is not to accord it any special status, but to situate it within the domain of the ordinary to further our understanding into the struggles and predicaments of the human condition.

References


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Understanding the Perversion of Curiosity and Concern (Karnac Books).
Psychoanalysis and poetry
By Joan Thompson

A Freud Museum festival in June explored the links between poetry and psychoanalysis, and the extent to which language is, or is not, able to help us negotiate the intensity and excesses of our emotional lives.

The parallels between poetry and psychoanalysis were a continuing theme of the day. In the words of Salman Akhtar: ‘Both psychoanalysis and poetry deeply respect familiarity of structure, nuance of affect, and the multifaceted resonance of the spoken word.’

Displacement is an abiding theme in Bernard O’Donoghue’s poetry. He gave a moving account of his teenage evacuation from a farm in County Cork, Ireland, to Manchester after the untimely death of his father. Farmers Cross explores the themes of immigrants, refugees and exiles and the tales they have to tell. He read from his poem ‘Emigration’:

Unhappy the man who has laced the occasion to return to the village on a sun-struck May morning, to shake the hands of the neighbours he’d left a lifetime ago and tell the world’s wonders, before settling down by his hearth once again.

The audience asked thoughtful questions about ‘home’ and the complex, ambivalent feelings that can arise when you turn your back on the ‘mother country’. The discussion explored the idea of memory, and the nostalgic, partially idealised ache that can develop for a home you love but feel you can never return to. Bernard read his poem ‘Mule Diagnoses’ to highlight a more negative experience than his own.

And then for the first and only time I saw my parents embracing. I hate that country: its poverty and embarrassments too humbling to recall. I’ll never ever go back to offer it forgiveness.

When my father died at last, the place was empty. I went back to bury him, then turned the key in the lock and dropped it in the estate-agent’s letterbox and turned my back for ever on it all.

There was a general discussion about the positive and negative experiences of migration. In some cases, people who leave the constraints of their homeland feel freer to develop their own sense of individuality. Bernard has positive memories of Ireland and returns frequently, yet acknowledges the advantages and greater educational opportunities he gained from St Bede’s Grammar school in Manchester.

David Morgan gave a psychoanalytical perspective about the loss of the object which needs to be mourned. Some people mourn the object effectively, but on other occasions, migrants remain mentally shackled to their motherland. This point was well illustrated with reference to James Joyce’s exile from the ‘Dear Dirty Dublin’ that he simultaneously loved and hated. David talked with Bernard about the impact of the loss of his father at such a tender young age.

Sam Willets gave a deeply moving account of his mother’s plight during the Holocaust and her escape, aged 14, to Dublin. That she should fight the Nazis. Sam’s mother died when he was 19.

Sam talked of the guilt he carried as a child of a Holocaust survivor. He described how, although his mother never mentioned her experiences, he could see and feel the pain etched on her face as her entire family was annihilated by the Nazis. Sam’s mother died when he was 19.

He talked about his desire to run away and his truancy at school, describing his current struggles and past regrets. The desire to escape reality established a pattern, which eventually led him into the dark hall of heroin addiction, graphically depicted in his poem ‘Digging’:

I’m back in the basement, heart sick, digging for a vein in February as in a February gone and a February still to come, spitting prayers through the tourniquet between my teeth, locking up tears and pleading for my blood to plumb up in the barrel, please blossom up, squish ind, blood-anemone.

Sam lost touch with his beloved partner Carol as a result of his self-destructiveness, but he is now in recovery.

The audience drew on Freud’s ideas of the Death Instinct to help interpret the poem and think about Sam’s descent into addiction. Gerry Byrne talked about trauma, loss, guilt and the desire to escape reality.

Caroline Garland asked Jane Draycott about the harrowing and untimely death of her brother in 1988. Jane read from her poem ‘Prince Rupert’s Drop’, written shortly after her brother’s death. A Prince Rupert’s Drop is a tadpole-shaped glass form resembling a teardrop. It is created by dropping molten glass into cold water and the resulting shape is extremely strong. The italicised epigraph to the poem implies that Jane is using the Drop to describe a state of high emotional tension.

The rapid cooling of this extraordinary glass drop leaves it in a state of enormous tension…

It’s brilliant. It’s tear you can stand a car on, the hard eye of a chandelier ready to break down and weep like a baby, a rare birth, cooled before its time. It’s an ear of glass accidentally sown in the coldest of water, that sheer drop, rock solid except for the tail or neck which will snap like sugar, kick like a mortar under the surefire touch of your fingertips.

Jane talked candidly about how she lost her father, mother and brother in a very short space of time and turned to poetry to help try to come to terms with her devastating losses. Caroline read a brief passage from Freud’s Mourning and Melancholia, describing the work that the ego has to perform in mourning the lost object. There was a general discussion amongst the audience about the death of loved ones and the grief that follows.

At the end of the day the three poets and David, Gerry and Caroline all chose a poem close to their own hearts and read it to the audience. This was a nice ending to the conference.

This excellent conference explored the links between poetry and psychoanalysis, and the extent to which language is, or is not, able to help us negotiate the intensity and excesses of our emotional lives. Indeed, ambiguity is a daily business for both poets and psychoanalysts, as they probe the hidden subtexts beneath the words on the page and the utterances from the couch.
Reflection

I still think about my therapist

By Chimène Suleymen

I STILL THINK about my therapist. I still wonder what he may be doing, or smile when I re-encounter suggestions we shared. I still hear his voice sometimes, passing advice even now when situations feel a little tough. For years, like many I suspect, if I avoided seeing someone: an admittance of defeat, shameful, and judged. I wouldn’t open up, not to him, not to anyone. Perhaps it became too much in the end; my unkind preconceptions of therapy would have to take a back seat to the pain I needed to fix.

I remember we were very well matched. He considered, perhaps unorthodoxly, the aspects of our lives, characters, that we may have shared and how this would help us understand each other better. I spoke at great length; of my insecurities, how trapped I felt in a job that didn’t fulfill, relationships that were never ultimately balanced. I cried often. I was scared, forced to face aspects of my character and life which I despised. We spent a year in each other’s company, a time when, I must say, I opened up. Older, with even less to lose, I felt more comfortable, more certain of what I wanted to discuss. It was an incredible time. One engulfed by as much loneliness as I experienced dramatic joy. I was learning; I suspect that for the first time I was capable of taking care of myself, of my own company as much as I loathed it, and there was nothing quite like this independence, which I became so proud of.

My ex, like many, had been wrong, therapy, or indeed asking for help, was not about relying on another. It was not giving in to pain, or bad thoughts. I was, in fact, helping myself, on my own, like I had never done before. I enjoyed a space that was purely mine. A room, a time, a relationship that had nothing to do with any other person, or aspect of my life. The less fearful I was of my therapist judging me, the less fearful I became of being judged by anyone. We shared suggestions for books worth reading; exhibitions worth visiting, films that were important to watch. We found ways to guide my thoughts in a fashion that suited; suggestions that were simple extensions of what I already understood and enjoyed.

For two years I continued my life without him. In this time I changed enough of my life to sustain a happiness outside of therapy. Short of this two year period I remember feeling the need to see him again, even before my relationship at this time ended. Perhaps I saw the break-up coming, perhaps it was the overwhelming burden of continuously maintaining a hard facade with a partner who refused to accept that depression exists. I cracked. And when I returned to my therapist I was new single, living in a new home, having quit my job to risk my career as a writer.

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Deadline: The next issue of New Association will be published in March 2014. The deadline for article proposals is 20 December 2013. Contributions and letters to the Editor should reach us no later than 20 January 2014.
**Book Review**


Reviewed by Amita Sehgal

Life Lessons From Freud is a friendly and approachable yet intelligent and rigorous book written by Professor Brett Kahr. It forms part of a series of six books commissioned by The School of Life; each book in this series, Life Lessons, aims to demystify the ideas of one great thinker of our time and make it relevant to our everyday life.

In Life Lessons From Freud, Brett Kahr does much more than just demystify Freud. In his inimitable style of storytelling, Kahr captures the essence of Freud and presents the man and his teachings with a stylishly contemporary twist. Kahr writes simply and clearly, and his natural ability and flair for presenting complex psychoanalytic ideas in manageable and easily digestible ways underpins the unassuming tone of this book. No previous knowledge of Freud and his works is required of the reader, as Kahr tells the story of a man who rose from humble beginnings in nineteenth century Vienna to become a trailblazer in the care and treatment of people suffering from deep psychological distress.

Kahr describes some of the significant influences on Freud’s life, life lessons that Freud himself learnt during his own lifetime, that led him to develop a substantial treatment method to alleviate emotional pain. Freud's treatment method, of using psychoanalytic psychotherapy to treat psychological disorders, encompassed his own deep compassion for human suffering. By allowing patients to talk and to tell their stories, and by listening to them carefully and thoughtfully, Freud brought relief to people who for years had been tormented by a whole host of symptoms.

Life Lessons From Freud is pitched at making Freud user-friendly to persons with little or no previous knowledge of psychoanalysis, but who are keen to engage in wanting to know more. To this end, chapter by chapter Kahr engages the reader in a straightforward and uncomplicated manner to consider how the lessons that Life taught Freud, and his ways of communicating through and learning from stories. In his inspired and inspiring way he masterfully tells carefully selected stories of Freud and his works in the tradition of true storytelling, feeding the imaginations across generations. In doing so, Kahr empowers the reader to take a few life lessons from Freud. He says, ‘Freud bequeathed to us a rich, detailed and provocative psychology which, once absorbed, has the ability to improve our sensitivity to ourselves and others, to deepen our creativities, and to enhance the fabric of our lives.’ This gem of a pocket-sized book does just that.

or ‘How to Kill a Really Funny Joke’, appear incongruous with the theme of this book. But on closer inspection and some deliberation, each of the eight chapter titles encapsulates the kinds of human experiences which most of us can relate to in varying degrees. Ordinary human struggles and preoccupations about relationships, careers, being understood, wanting to get close to another, managing success and failures and generally enjoying life are placed in the context of Freudian thought. Kahr uses what we have learnt from Freud to consider the hidden infantile and childhood origins of our adult thoughts, behaviours and fantasies which cause us emotional distress, leading us to reflect on why we might think or behave in the ways that we do. Life Lessons From Freud stimulates the reader's thinking.

In drawing it to a close, Kahr recognises that readers keen to further their interest in Freud might struggle to know where to start, how to negotiate their way through the many books, essays and letters that Freud wrote. With this in mind, the section signposting the reader to the various texts that range in seriousness and depth and arduous critical studies of Freud is indispensable.

Kahr’s tremendous wealth of knowledge and experience and dedicated practice in the field of psychotherapy runs alongside his awareness that we are wired for communicating through and learning from stories. In his inspired and inspiring way he masterfully tells carefully selected stories of Freud and his works in the tradition of true storytelling, feeding the imaginations across generations. In doing so, Kahr empowers the reader to take a few life lessons from Freud. He says, ‘Freud bequeathed to us a rich, detailed and provocative psychology which, once absorbed, has the ability to improve our sensitivity to ourselves and others, to deepen our creativities, and to enhance the fabric of our lives.’ This gem of a pocket-sized book does just that.

In the same debate, Baroness Tyler explained how the We Need To Talk coalition had showed that non-IAPT services were either having their funding cut or being entirely decommissioned, so that IAPT was replacing, not improving, the provision of psychological therapies. Lord Alderdice quoted a Royal College of Psychiatrists report that showed: ‘There is a serious problem relating to the deployment and availability of senior staff, with adequate psychotherapy and psychiatry training. It is likely that because of these services and staffing defects, the majority of self-harm remains invisible until a crisis occurs, adding to human misery and to the stress on hospital services.’

On 16 October the new Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Mental Health, James Morris MP, led a Westminster Hall debate on psychological therapies. Questioning the CBT dominance of the IAPT programme, Morris argued that ‘In Britain, we have a mature and highly professionalised cohort of therapists in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. They have, over the past five years, found themselves unable to provide the sort of capacity that we need in IAPT. One of the consequences of that, and of the dominance of CBT, with a focus on training up therapists to concentrate on CBT, is that we have a monolithic model.’ He also questioned the overreliance on Randomised Controlled Trials for psychological therapies, arguing that we need to look at new types of evidence base. The BPC’s Gary Fereday met with James Morris following the debate, and the BPC will be maintaining an ongoing dialogue.
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