

Friday Seminars

Book now or join us on the day for:

Amelia Mangani

The function of money in the analytic treatment.

Friday 12 July 2013 6.30 to 8.30 p.m.

Venue: The Manchester Institute for Psychotherapy, 454 Barlow Moor Road, Chorlton, Manchester M21 0BQ.

Amelia will talk about there being two exchanges in the therapy room: words and money. Does money talk and, if so, what does it say? What the therapist has to offer is paid for, but more money doesn't buy more of it. So what is it we value when we value money?

Amelia Mangani is a consultant clinical psychologist and a psychoanalytic psychotherapist in private practice in south Manchester.

More Friday Seminars



The NWRPA is on holiday in August. We will return for a series of three monthly seminars from September 2013. The theme for these seminars will be "On being a Therapist." Join us on the second Friday of the month in Chorlton.



Helen Rowland

Where Truth Lies: The Postmodern Turn in Psychotherapy
Friday 14 June 2013

Before thanking Helen I would like to appreciate the people who have attended this year's series of seminars. There has been a lovely atmosphere every month. Our speakers have been enthusiastic and knowledgeable and so have our members and guests. Everybody has been involved and made fascinating contributions to our discussions. This month was no exception. It was a seminar nobody wanted to end.

And thank you Helen. I have failed to grasp postmodernism in the past. As she pointed out there are very dense postmodern theories which developed in the academic world. Now I both understand and can find a pragmatic use for this approach.

Postmodernism is a critique of the core ideas of modernity which began with the Enlightenment. These include concepts of identity, truth, reality and being in a knowable world. Postmodernism uses a hermeneutic methodology. Meaning here is something which emerges from context, from understanding. It is not a search for the identification of causes or for the solving of problems.

The postmodern turn that Helen referred to is the linguistic turn in post structuralism associated with Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. In this view language is discursive and part of our shaping of reality.

Our sense of reality comes to seem normal, solid and obvious but it is established through competing ideologies and discourses. Meaning is never obvious, always slippery. We need to consider both sign and signifier. Signs take the form of words, images, sounds, odours, flavours, acts or objects, but such things have no intrinsic meaning. They become signs only when we invest them with meaning. That is signifying something, referring to or standing for something other than itself. For example Helen asked to talk about the word "trust" and between us we had a huge range of meanings.

A signifier is part of a chain of signifiers. Each one linked to others. Hence meaning is unstable, prone to slippage and always deferred. For postmodernists previous philosophies are logocentric. These philosophies stand outside the world they organise. For Derrida nothing stands outside language, there is no centre to stand in, only an infinity of discourses.

Donna M. Orange talks about perspectivism. That nothing stands outside discourse also includes ourselves. We may experience a solid sense of identity but we are an ambiguous force field of competing ideologies. The stable self is a comforting illusion. The scary, or liberating, thought here is that *there is no such thing as the real self*. This is obviously contrary to many therapies which are oriented around the notion of a real or authentic self. Another thought about discourses is that not all discourses are equal and there are discourses which are more privileged than others.

What I really liked about Helen's view of postmodernism is the pragmatic way she uses these theories in her work with clients. My previous (mis)understanding of postmodernism left me feeling I was standing on the shifting sands of discursive recursiveness.

Postmodern therapy means we get close to our clients. We get curious, and stay curious about meaning. This is a dialogue, a searching together. It is not just the therapist who finds meaning. Where competing discourses clash there is a possibility that new and different meanings emerge. The fact that our clients are troubled can mean that their discourses are causing distress. For example a client with a very powerful traditional masculinity and who is feeling depressed may well be having clashing discourses.

A therapist is a participant observer in a two person dialogue. Following Donna M. Orange we should consider not only *contextualism* and *perspectivism* but also *fallibilism*. Fallibilism means we have a sensibility that we are vulnerable and should hold onto meaning lightly. There are no experts around here and the therapist is not one. Neither is the client so do not cling on to their frame of meaning, or fight with them about meaning. It is a dialogue not an interrogation. We should remember not to create a therapeutic frame where the client only gets to talk about what we ask.

An important point here is that clients are often distressed because they do not have a hermeneutic capacity, the capacity to make meanings that lead to helpful understandings of their distress. For the distressed client meaning may be prematurely closed or may be part of a grand narrative which is monolithic and not easily open to change. There is no real self. There are multiple selves so it is not helpful to think about aspects of the self as defensive, as authentic, as normal. Integration of the self is not the aim of postmodern therapy. Problematising integration and accepting we contain fundamentally conflicting discourses and can still function in a healthy way is helpful.

Do not think of theories of counselling and therapy as models. Use them as metaphors for explaining experience. Work consciously with with multiplicities, multiple selves, multiple meanings and multiple narratives. Think and feel contradictory things simultaneously. Play like Donald Winnicott.

In postmodernism there are few asymmetries between therapist and client. One of the few is in the ethical plane where the therapist holds an ethical responsibility to the client. The therapists job is not to regulate the normal and the healthy or to assist in the reproduction of ideologies. It is to work at the interface of the personal and social unconscious, to tune into the gaps between discourses, to explore ideological discourses not just psychological processes. Our challenge is not challenging the client but attending to the edge of something new.

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