

Seminars for 2014

The NWRPA returns after a winter rest. We have begun another year of our successful Friday Evening Seminars. For our Spring Programme we have:

Jim Davis on *Working with Couples* Friday 14 February 2014

Frank Denning with *Transference Focused Psychotherapy* Friday 14 March 2014

Paula Gillespie-Fotheringham on *Self-care: A Creative Approach* Friday 11 April 2014

As always these seminars are free to members and £7.50 for non-members. We meet at our regular venue the Manchester Institute for Psychotherapy, 454 Barlow Moor Road, Chorlton, Manchester M21 0BQ from 6.30 to 8.30 pm.

Looking forward

- A full programme of seminars for 2014
- A full day event in 2015
- A celebration of the Association's 40th birthday in 2015

My Work - Your Work: A Group Discussion

Friday, 10 January 2014

Introduced by Frank Kelley and Paul Melia

The NWRPA is organised through Kath Skaife's atmosphere creative chairing of our seminars and the executive meetings of Paul Melia and Frank Kelley. These meetings are in reality meandering conversations over coffee at the Elektrik Bar in Chorlton. In one these, late last year, we were both struck by the Association's diverse and active group of members and seminar goers.

We were curious about the therapeutic approaches of other members. We particularly enjoyed members recalling vignettes from day to day life in the therapy room. We often wondered whether what they described were ways of working which were consistent with their training and model or were adaptations they had learned through experience. We also had little frissons when other people described interventions with clients that we might not be able to allow ourselves, or only with a struggle. In a moment of clarity we thought a group discussion would bring these pleasures and curiosities into focus. Knowing how our members enjoy a discussion we offered a short introduction and as anticipated those present joined in with their usual liveliness and expertise.

Thank you to our member Amanda Onwuemene. We had double booked at our usual venue and she provided a room at the Psychotherapy and Counselling North West office suites in Chorlton at short notice. NB this report keeps to the NWRPA's long established custom of not publishing confidential information about clients and members.

We began by introducing ourselves. This showed how diverse our membership is. All these differences in employment situation, place of work and therapy model used are listed below. Bear in mind that this diversity came from just the seven people who attended on that cold January evening.

NHS Secondary and Primary Care • Prison • IAPT • GP Practice • Private Practice • Trainee Integrative Client Centred • Psychodynamic • Clinical Psychologist • Lacanian Psychoanalyst Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist • Psychodynamic Counsellor • Transactional Analysis Eclectic Counselling/Person Centred.

What was held in common was that we all value the therapeutic alliance and believe that practising therapy is more than learning technique; that caring needs to be genuine. However the differences in our day to day to day are quite surprising.

I had always thought, from working in an NHS Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Service, that part of holding a boundary is that psychoanalysts do not have phone calls with their patients. But Lacanian Analysts can because if a patient misses a session then a phone call from the analyst is a reminder that they should come to do the work of the session. Also in this approach there are no absolute interventions. The main purpose of an intervention is it's therapeutic effect. Hence Lacanians have more flexibility than other analysts. The way they can vary session length is another example.

This part of the discussion was about interventions that fit in one model but surprise therapists using another model. There is another surprise where therapists develop their own style through experience. This involves what may be described as a struggle with a professional superego; a tension between what would my trainer/supervisor do and what would I do.

Here we came to what for me was the more memorable part of the evening. Some of us offer clients a cup of tea or coffee. For some this is a courteous, human and caring way of responding to the people we see for therapy. This is a clear expression of the therapeutic alliance. For others there was a sharp intake of breath; a visceral surprise that some therapists can do this. For some of us this would be a breaking of boundaries, a defensive action by both client and therapist. If not unthinkable offering a cup of coffee is undoable. If done this would require a discussion of the dynamics of this act in supervision.

We then had a palpable sense of our professional superego. Of the ideas from the founders of our approaches, from our teachers, supervisors, the people we work with. The voices that watch over what we do and guide us. Or watch over us in a critical and inhibiting way. None of us would want to fail to reflect on the accumulated wisdom of our internalised professional guides. However later we wondered if some of our sense of this oversight can also be unhelpful or inhibiting. This is most clear with a dread of what we do now leading to being sued or the subject of investigation by our employing or registering bodies. Or in a lesser way a fear of disapproval from our colleagues or, in an even more internal way, by our own ability to be harsh with ourselves.

This point was illustrated by a discussion of time boundaries and whether we finish sessions on time. As with offering clients coffee there was a sense of relief in talking about this. "Yes I do that as well." That our professional superegos would not recommend we finish sessions past time yet we all have done this and with good reasons. For example in allowing clients time to draw themselves together to face the world, to finish something important or for obsessive clients to allow themselves a healthy change by not being obsessed about punctuality. One observation here is that the way we do therapy works well if it fits well with who we are as people. For example that close adherence to time boundaries works better for therapists who are naturally very punctual people.

At the end of the evening something struck me about the nature of the NWRPA. We are not a training or registering organisation. Hence as a group we do not have as much of a formal professional superego responsibility as most other therapeutic organisations.

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