

NWRPA Friday Evening Seminars

Talking Points: A Symposium

Friday 12 December 2014, 6.30pm-8.30pm, free to members, £7.50 to non-members

Members are invited to bring a guest free of charge to this workshop

Four therapists speak for 15 minutes each on a topic of their choosing. They'll be plenty of time for questions and discussions, and light refreshments are available.

Ann Heathcoate: why are we psychotherapists?

Ann will explore our reasons for becoming psychotherapists and counsellors by considering some of the literature regarding the psychological underpinnings of this choice of career. Ann is a certified transactional analyst (psychotherapy) and director of The Worsley Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling, Manchester www.theworsleycentre.com

Natalie Marshall-Shore: the client's desire for change

How many therapists does it take to change a light bulb? One - but the light bulb has got to want to change! How do clients arrive at this moment of change, and how do we help them seize it? Natalie is an integrative counsellor at Rise Above Counselling, Manchester www.riseabovecounselling.co.uk

Patrick Wright: making faces

A talk about pareidolia - the seeing of faces or other meaningful patterns in apparently random phenomena - illustrated using stories drawn from British tabloid newspapers. Patrick Wright is a mental health worker and poet based in Manchester www.patrickwright.co.uk

Frank Kelley: the hundred worlds of therapy

A few years ago Frank read a therapy article in which the author referred to projective identification as a therapeutically useful fiction. This started him thinking..! Frank is a psychodynamic counsellor in the NHS and secretary of the NWRPA

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

An introduction to Sociopathy by Amanda Onwuemene

Friday 14 November 2014

Amanda is the Director of Psychotherapy and Counselling North West and a Transactional Analyst with a private practice in Liverpool and Manchester. You can contact her through her website www.pcnw.co.uk

If you want to read more about this topic Amanda suggests *The Sociopath Next Door* by Martha Stout

Thank you to Amanda for this well organised and insightful introduction to Sociopathy. This talk was related to her Masters Degree study of personality disorder. Her interest in Sociopathy came from her therapeutic work with clients who were traumatised by partners or family members who had this personality disorder.

Often Sociopathy is an internal experience that others are unlikely to see through, a mask that can be quite playful. What was difficult for those listening to Amanda's talk was to grasp the sociopath's experience of anxiety. Often they have themselves been abused while growing up. They have often been the child who survives highly insecure families in a state of frozen watchfulness.

For many of our clients this kind of history leads to a sense of insecurity and vulnerability in adult life. However Sociopaths deny any anxiety by quickly discharging it, and discharging it through the repeated abuse of other people. They can do this because they find a position of power where they are not



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questioned and so become CEOs, priests, police officers etc. For a sociopath the end always justifies the means and they are often charming manipulators. Of course they can also gain powers over partners and children and become domestic tyrants.

More men than women are sociopaths. They often have an ambivalent relation to their mothers. They are made to feel special and have displaced their fathers who are treated with contempt. In Transactional Analysis terms the father is in a one down position. Despite being special they do not get affection from their mother but are often rewarded financially. Here is the mask again. Despite the reality the child will look well cared for. They are treated in an unconditional way. Nothing they do is ever wrong and they grow up with an automatic sense of entitlement.

It is thought that sociopaths fail to have normal neurological development. Limbic emotions are not effectively processed cerebrally in a form of arrested development. They come from families which do not have a language of emotions.

Sociopaths will flout social rules without guilt and with no empathy for their victims. Guilt and empathy would be obstacles to getting what they want. They are experts at charming, manipulating and intimidating other people and have practised this since childhood. If challenged they will push back. They can be so intimidating that other people will just give up. They both lack empathy and have an uncanny sensitivity to others' vulnerabilities. When they push back they wait for a response and then often switch back to being charming and manipulative. One common example is that if their partner stands up to them they can switch from being bullying to appearing very upset, guilty about what they have done and declaring they really love their partners. This apparent remorse is purely to reassert control.

Their partners often deny these difficulties in the honeymoon period. After this the sociopath's nature becomes more obvious. However by this time the partner is often enmeshed in the relationship through charm, manipulation and intimidation. The sociopath's motivated denial that they are doing nothing wrong can sometimes be so powerful that it also distorts reality for the victim who becomes very confused about the reality of the wrongs done to them.

While the victims seek therapy sociopaths will only do so if this meets their immediate needs; for example a letter for a court. They may seek counselling for drug or alcohol problems. They may genuinely seek therapy when they are arrested and convicted and their lifelong defences break down. In therapy they are hard to work with. They are easily bored, can crave attention and will charm the therapist to avoid effective help or feign recovery to end therapy.

The founder of Transactional Analysis Eric Berne, in *Games People Play-1961*, said that patients will attempt to reveal the basic maturational needs for objects that were not met during the course of development. This may be difficult for the therapist. A sociopath in therapy will communicate through massive projective identification and dissociation. They are likely to act out and any therapeutic usefulness will quickly lead to the reassertion of omnipotent control. The therapist's helpfulness will be seen as a weakness. What helps in therapy is to consistently keep the patient in reality, to use humour and to consistently keep in mind how the triangle of persecutor/victim/rescuer works and how these triangular relationships can shift about, in reality and in the transference.

What struck me during Amanda's talk was that in our therapeutic work we are used to empathising with the victims of sociopaths. Perhaps along with others at this presentation I found it hard to grasp the nature of Sociopathy. This was not due to her presentation, which she made with her characteristic clarity, but because it is very hard to have an empathic grasp of people who are themselves unempathic and know how they experience their world. It is a tribute to Amanda that we were able to begin to do this.

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