

NWRPA Friday Evening Seminars**An introduction to Sociopathy** by Amanda Onwuemene

Friday 14 November 2014, 6.30pm-8.30pm, free to members, £7.50 to non-members

The seminar takes an interest in individuals who whilst possibly devoid of a mental health diagnosis nonetheless display patterns of behaviours and thinking that can be termed sociopathic.

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Talking Points: A Symposium

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

The NWRPA celebrates the beginning of the festive season with a lively symposium: four psychotherapists speaking for 15 minutes each on a therapy topic of their choosing. They'll be plenty of time for questions and discussions. Light refreshments available at this as well as the preceding events.

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

We don't want to get all worked up over a tomato stalk again, do we? The Function of Phobia in Therapy

Paul Melia

Friday 10 October 2014

Contact Paul Melia, Psychotherapist, at <TherapyInManchester.co.uk>

Paul's fascinating and thought provoking talk was about the function of phobia and how different therapies approach this. He has kindly offered to circulate the slides from his presentation with an attachment to the emailing of this newsletter. His presentation was oriented around a radio broadcast.

I'm Suzy and I'm a Phobic with Suzie Klein and Paul Salkovskis. This was first broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on the 2nd of January 2013. In this programme Suzie talked about her phobia of travelling on the Tube and the comedian Phill Jupitus talked about his fear of spiders.

Paul's title came from Phill Jupitus's account of his phobia where he talks of being six and moving to a country house where, in low light, he mistakes tomato stalks for the feared spiders. Paul used a literary device which involves a reversal of his title into *We do want to get all worked up over a tomato stalk again, don't we?* This is a thought which is central to his understanding of the function of phobias. Paul then talked of the way phobias are seen in Freudian psychoanalysis and in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

The conventional view is that a phobia is an anxiety disorder. The treatments recommended by NICE are CBT, EMDR, medication (usually benzodiazepines), support groups and most importantly graded exposure. Exposure Therapies are designed to encourage clients to enter feared situations, in imagination and then in reality, and to remain there. Situations are graded for each individual, from mildly anxiety provoking to those that are feared most. A typical example would be:

1. Think about a spider
 2. Look at a cartoon drawing of spider
 3. Look at a serious drawing of a spider
 4. Look at a photo of a spider
 5. Look at an empty spider web
 6. Touch an empty spider web
 7. Look at a real spider in a box
 8. Hold the box with the spider
 9. Look at a real spider, not in a box, from across the room
 10. Look at a real spider from halfway across the room
 11. Look at a real spider up close
 12. Let a spider crawl on something I'm holding (e.g. A piece of paper)
 13. Hold a spider in my hand
- [Buchanan and Coulson (2012), p. 72-73]

Continuing Professional Development

The £25.00 annual membership means you can enjoy all ten NWRPA seminars each year and add twenty hours to your CPD.

If you would like to present one of our monthly seminars then you can gain even more CPD hours.

If you listen to Suzie Klein's broadcast on a podcast she has recorded gradually going to a Tube station and then to a train with her therapist for treatment of her phobia about travelling on Tube trains.

Paul's point about these CBT related therapies for phobias is that the unconscious is absent. Freud's view of phobia is, of course, attentive to unconscious dynamics. This is set out in his case history *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five Year Old Boy* (this is the case of *Little Hans*). He treated Hans for a phobia of horses. He met Hans once and most of the treatment followed daily correspondence with his father.

In contrast to CBT and graded exposure Freud says *Experience has shown that it is impossible to effect the cure of a phobia (and even in certain circumstances dangerous to attempt to do so) by violent means, that is, by first depriving the patient of his defences and then putting him in a situation in which he cannot escape the liberation of his anxiety.* (Freud, *Little Hans*, section 3 p. 275)

Freud said that Hans's anxiety, like every infantile anxiety is without an object to begin with (ibid p. 188) and *An anxiety hysteria tends to develop more and more into a 'phobia'. In the end the patient may have got rid of all his anxiety, but only at the price of subjecting himself to all kinds of inhibitions and restrictions... it is these protective structures that appear to us in the form of phobias* (ibid p. 275). Hans's phobia of horses develops over time into paired fears. The horse will bite or not bite, he will fall off the horse or stay on, the horse will pull a carriage or not. This child, as Freud observed, developed inhibitions and restrictions which severely limited his life at a time when horses were ubiquitous.

Paul then turned to Phill Jupitus's spider phobia. He reminded us of the reversed statement *We do want to get all worked up over a tomato stalk again, don't we?* He then asked us to treat the transcript of the radio programme as a client's speech in therapy. (This transcript is included in Paul's attachment in your newsletter email.)

We all had our ideas about this. Paul's own thoughts were about movement. He identified ten references to movement in this short transcript. For example *Brelades* the name of the house in the country where Phill's phobia began is a corruption of *Branwalader* the name of a wandering saint. Hence the defensive structure of a phobia converts an anxiety into a specific fear of spiders. What Paul has done here is to reverse the process. Beginning with speech about a spider phobia he has begun to explore how anxiety becomes a fear of spiders

Paul talked about the unconscious fantasy that anxiety is uncontrollable. For adults these anxieties are a sign of the return of the repressed. For children anxiety is a signal of loss. For example with Little Hans the anxiety which structured his phobia of horses was an anxiety about separation from his mother.

Lacan took this Freudian idea about anxiety a step further. Infantile anxiety signals the absence of loss (lack of a lack). The anxiety is about a failure to separate from the mother. In Lacanian psychoanalysis it is the father who offers separation from the mother. (for a chilling example of a failure to separate see Joan Bakewell interviewing Jimmy Savile in Paul's attachment.) In the book *What Is Madness?* by the Lacanian Darian Leader (2011 p. 65) separation is giving up who we imagined we were to mother; we are the unique cause of another's emotion which is terribly unbearable. We would remain in a world with no mediation between ourselves and the mother. A phobia is very useful as structured defence against this anxiety.

Freud moves between treating anxiety as a symptom and as a structure. For Lacan the phobia is a peculiar structure, a roundabout, which separated the child from mother, a structure which we can go round to neurosis or perversion. If anxiety is a signal it means it can be very easily transmitted by another. This is why the therapist and counsellor must not allow their own anxiety to interfere with the treatment.

If you will permit me a terrible pun; Paul elegantly navigated us through a very large and complex roundabout without us losing our sense of direction.

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