

NWRPA Newsletter February 2025

Touch in Therapy

Katrina Ashton

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Summary by Frank Kelley

Katrina Ashton has an unusual professional life. She trained as a nurse followed by a long and continuing practice as a midwife. Contrasting with this she is a UKCP registered and practising Psychoanalytic Psychotherapist.

She described the physicality of her nurse training. Of wiping up blood, tears and other bodily fluids. Of bathing a patient who had smeared faeces on herself. Of later having the psychoanalytic understanding of the inner life of a toddler where faeces are a loving gift or a hostile aggression.

Relevant here are Hanna Segal's work on symbol formation and Donald Winnicott's thoughts on knowing, being and doing. She reminded us of the contrasting thoughts on mind and body we can explore through the thoughts of Sigmund Freud, Sandor Ferenczi and Heinz Kohut.

The place of the body and touch in psychoanalytic psychotherapy is a theme that runs across her two professional selves. With her psychotherapeutic work she put her hands on a client's shoulder to say *you are here with me*. Because of the centrality of the analyst's issue of touch this was a topic for therapy and supervision. Katrina has reservations about the conventional ban on touching in psychoanalysis. While this ban is upheld by many analysts the people she favours, Winnicott, Ferenczi and Kohut, used touch in their analytic work.

Winnicott thought it was nice to hide but a tragedy not to be found. Touch can open up this theme in analysis. However there are reasons to be cautious. Touch can be intrusive and this is particularly salient when working with clients with eating disorders. There are also linguistic approximates to touch and poetry can do this.

Katrina noted that touch is a theme when professional bodies are hearing complaints. Her view is that we should let patients know what kind of therapy they will be getting.

Thank you to Katrina Ashton for encouraging us to explore a fundamentally important part of our professional practice. And another thank you for kindly stepping in at the last moment when our planned speaker was unavailable.