

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

THE SUPPORT NETWORK FOR THOSE ABUSED BY THERAPISTS
P O Box 542, North Road, Brighton Sussex BN1 1AA

Dear David Jones,

I refer to your publication of an article on sexual abuse in therapy by a practitioner, Geoffrey Whitfield, who teaches counselling courses at Brighton and has taught the counselling diploma course at Brighton Polytechnic.

The Support Network for those abused by therapists exists because of the isolation of people sexually or emotionally exploited by therapists, because of the professional disbelief and hostility they face if they tell; because of the difficulty in making complaints; the almost universal invalidation of their testimony; the complete lack of power and denial of their reality.

Any professional seems to have instant credibility and a platform to speak but how can you ignore "consumers"? Without them the profession of psychotherapy would not exist. If you want to know about sexual or emotional abuse in therapy, the person to ask is someone who has experienced it as a client. If professionals continue to ignore what "consumers" have to say in an attempt to preserve the good name of psychotherapy, I believe that you will in effect cause an underground revolution, a general undermining of faith in the new religion, where professionals lecture and write for others of the initiated and then find they have no-one left to practise on.

Anyone who has not experienced abuse by a therapist will find it difficult to fathom the hurt and damage caused and the often subtle way it is inflicted. Even a tape recording of a session would not necessarily reveal just what is going on. It can be built up gradually and in such a way that at the time clients are not aware what is happening. Professional standing, status or qualifications are unfortunately absolutely no guarantee of integrity. One study in the United States shows 10% of psychiatrists alone actually self reporting erotic contact with patients. Most of the people I hear from have been abused by someone qualified in their field and successful. Many well qualified therapists are very clever in covering their tracks and clients are frightened of their power. They fear, quite rightly, that the therapist will be given credibility and they will be warned about slanderous accusations.

Geoffrey Whitfield has been found guilty of serious professional misconduct and he is allowed a platform to give us the benefit of his "knowledge" on the subject of abuse in therapy. Someone who appears to be "concerned" with the problem of abuse in therapy is obviously going to appear whiter than white, pointing the finger elsewhere, but I am appalled at the insult added to injury caused to the people he has already damaged, and that he may actually be sought out by

people who have already been abused in therapy as someone understanding of their situation. It doesn't bear thinking about.

The Support Network is a self help network for anyone who feels they have been sexually or emotionally exploited by a therapist.

Jill Sinclair

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P O Box 542, North Road, Brighton, Sussex BN1 1AA

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