

to say about psychotherapy as a whole. They can only deal with types of therapy which do not handle such material, such as the various forms of cognitive-behavioural therapy.

So if on the one hand NVQs cannot handle entrepreneurial activity, which I have argued is close to what therapists practise — and on the other hand they cannot handle the unconscious or the transpersonal — then they cannot be of much relevance to humanistic practitioners. At

any rate that is what I would argue.

It is quite sad for me to say this, because I was involved with the development of NVQs in the early stages, and participated in a couple of the originating workshops. I tried to give the idea every chance. But the closer I got to it, and the more I learned about it, the more clear I became that I could not participate any further, in spite of many requests to do so. In my opinion, the NVQ for humanistic practitioners is a dead duck.

Conference Reports

Women & Men Working Together for a Change, 15th & 16th June 1996

About 150 people attended this conference, which was held in the beautiful building of the Royal Geographical Society in Kensington Gore. The weather was beautiful too, and it was possible to make use of the attractive lawn behind the house. As we went in, we picked up our programme and our name badge, and then went to a table to sign up for the workshops to be held in the afternoon. With our programmes, we had a piece of paper showing where each workshop would be held, half for men and half for women. As we went in to the lecture hall, we passed through four screens, pushing through narrow gaps to get a sense of penetrating through veils to the real experience. All round the hall were large paintings on loose cloths, to give a sense of occasion, and on the stage stood two huge masks of African appearance, one at each side. Lolli Aboutboul was responsible

for all the art work, and she was given a hand at an appropriate time.

The organisers gave a brief introduction (Bernadette Valley and Richard Olivier) and we went into the first presentation, by Bea Campbell, who had just arrived after a journey. She talked about crime, and made the point that crime was mostly masculine, but no one ever said so. No one pointed to masculinity as the problem. She made it clear that she was talking about the dominant form of masculinity in our culture (sometimes called hegemonic masculinity) which has as its main reference point the avoidance of anything feminine. This anti-femininity often became actual misogyny. But in reality young men were more in danger from other young men than from anyone else. We then broke for refreshments.

There was quite a nice table set out with food and drinks, and you could buy

what you wanted. The prices were a little on the expensive side, as was the whole conference. As we went to the refreshments, we had to pass through a room with books and magazines. There was a good supply of *Achilles Heel*, I was glad to see, and free copies of *Human Potential* being given out.

After the break, it was the turn of Jeff Hearn, who spoke in some detail about a number of different aspects of male experience. He did not go for the currently popular idea of talking about many masculinities rather than just one masculinity; he said that he did not want to use the word masculinity at all. It was a good talk, but a little lacking in fire after the excitement of Bea Campbell. We then broke for lunch.

After lunch, Erica Helm Meade presented a native American legend called 'How the men's tribe and the women's tribe got together'. This was given in a dramatic form, with a rhythmic background, and with a good deal of humour. This was a creation myth, very different from the Adam and Eve story.

Michael Meade, her husband, followed on with a discussion of *litima*, an intense masculine energy described in African culture. It has positive and negative aspects, but it has to be reckoned with and properly handled if it is not to be dangerous. He followed this with another creation myth called 'When the women went one way and the men went the other', again with a lot of humour. He broke off this story half way, promising to deliver the other half on the next day.

After the break, we split up into men's groups and women's groups. My men's group was led by Michael Meade. I think

he had an exercise for us to do, but we spent so much time talking about anger and other topics that we never got around to it. We finished with an African chant which went on for quite some time, and which was heard by a number of the other groups because of the lack of soundproofing in the Edwardian house, and the fact that all the windows were open.

After another break, there was a general meeting in the lecture hall, which brought the day to an end.

The following day started off with a presentation by Andrew Samuels — a stimulating and very original collection of controversial ideas about sex and gender, including the idea that gender confusion might be a good thing rather than a bad thing, and that the female trickster represented a new version of femininity which gave more scope for fun. His talk was very well received and seemed very hopeful to people.

There followed straight away a talk by Bernadette Vallely, where she presented the results of a survey conducted by the Women's Communication Centre on what women want. I have to confess that so many figures one after the other made me a bit sleepy.

After a break for refreshments, two men talked about men at work. Ian Gee and Geoff Mead belong to a cooperative inquiry group which is working for the Office of Public Management. I was not clear as to what exactly the findings of the inquiry might have been, as both speakers talked in rather general terms.

We were then treated to a rather special presentation by Scilla Elworthy, talking about power, sex and change. Her own history was quite remarkable: she

organised a set of meetings in the 1980s between the real decision-makers in various countries, around the subject of peace. More recently, she was part of a team visiting Sarajevo and other places in the former Yugoslavia. She linked her very practical work with the whole topic of myth and the Great Goddess, finding a link with some of the important ideas of paganism. I found this very agreeable, and bought her book, called *Power & Sex*.

After lunch there was a presentation by Malidoma Somé and Sobonfu Somé, from the Dagara tribe in Africa. They talked about relations between men and women in a traditional culture and how they observed the differences between this culture and their own.

Then Michael Meade related the second half of the story 'When the women went one way and the men went another', which incorporated incidents from the

whole conference itself. This raised a lot of laughter and good energy.

We then split again into small groups, this time with mixed sexes. Each group had one of the presenters as a facilitator. The experiences in these groups was very varied.

Finally, after another break, we went to the lecture theatre for a summary from the speakers followed by the closing session. No definite plans were launched for future events, and no organisation emerged from the weekend. People seemed to feel that it was a small but important contribution to the greater health of relations between men and women.

It was a very well organised event, with plenty of opportunities to meet other people, and good spaces for doing it. I am glad I went.

John Rowan

The Body in Psychotherapy, 21st July, run by The Association of Chiron Psychotherapists

There were about 80 participants who heard papers from five speakers. Two of these were humanistic body workers, both American. The other three were psychoanalysts and rather British. Two annoying and difficult conflicts set the tone. One of the analysts, likeable, intelligent, a scourge of analytic bigotry and in tune with humanistic work, forgot that you need training and supervision to run experiential sessions. During his experiential hour he made every beginner's mistake. He rushed us through exercise after exercise at great speed and left no time at the

end for sharing. There were no co- or assistant facilitators to help those who got into distress. So we bottled it. As a result it leaked out when people tried to respond to a paper on Winnicott. This paper contained important material but false claims were made about the sufficiency of the symbolic holding environment. Actual holding in the therapeutic relationship was deemed unnecessary. A strong impression was given that it's OK for Winnicottians to remain ignorant of bodywork for they have nothing to learn from it anyway. The bodyworkers and humanistic

psychotherapists in the audience seemed unsure of their own bearings for mounting a counter-argument, as if we have no firm base in theory from which to argue. Registering dissent is not enough. Future

meetings are planned. Perhaps there will be one to show analysts how to follow process in the body. Bodyworkers will gain the respect, and the self-respect, they ought to have.

An IPN 'Linking' Weekend, 7th–9th June

The Independent Practitioners Network (IPN) is becoming more and more of a reality, a viable, working network from which I am already beginning to receive, and probably give, some of the professional and personal support and challenge (my 'key words') which I have always seen as fundamental to continuing good practice and development, both in my work capacity as a therapist and, indeed, as a human being. I have always worked as part of a colleague group in my own geographical area, at first with the hugely supportive, and hugely challenging, Norwich Collective, and after we disbanded in 1992, with Six of One . . . , who have been intensely involved with the forming of the IPN.

It has been a dream, or even a vision of mine, which I know I have in common with other practitioners, to be part of an extensive network of workers, committed to certain principles which are held as fundamental to our work with people. If asked to define these principles, I would be hesitant, for one of them is that the very act of definition can divide and reduce as well as clarify. Words that attach to these principles for me are words such as respect, peer, linking, flexibility, boundaries, relational, integrity, and connection.

Others would have different words. I

could also use a word like love — but again, my fear of being misunderstood in my definition, my fear of somehow losing the value, the richness of the experience contained within my use of the word, makes me hesitate. However, leaving aside self-conscious musing, I want to describe the beautiful weekend Six of One . . . spent with one of our link groups, the Hereford group, in a large house at the seaside in June. The idea came from our last meeting, in February, when Stephen described an experience he'd had as a child on the coast in North Norfolk, and as we also were discovering that we were enjoying each other's company. Someone said 'Let's go to the seaside'. So we did.

We rented a large house in Sheringham from Friday till Sunday, big enough to sleep eleven adults. Six of One . . . has five members in England at present. One of our members is on retreat until the winter, and who knows where her path will take her after that. The Hereford group has six members at present, one of whom, Wendy, was then a new member. They have had quite a changing membership since they formed, though there is a strong 'core'. Carol, from Six of One . . . could only come for Saturday night. We had no agenda, or no conscious agenda, and I know I was slightly apprehensive as

the weekend approached as to what it would be like. After all, we didn't really know each other, maybe we'd discover ghastly things about each other, maybe we'd discover we couldn't possibly support someone's practice because they were such an awful person, maybe, maybe, maybe.

What we actually did, effortlessly, was cook, shop and eat together, spend a day on the beach, swim and walk, sit up late at night talking and dancing, playing, singing and listening to music, be in all kinds of contact with one another according to each of our various tolerances, take space from each other and move back into contact freely, visit a country park overflowing with azaleas and rhododendrons all in full blossom at once (into which abundance one or two of us practically plunged our selves . . . nose first!), and have conversations both *en groupe* and one-to-one/-two/-three etc.

Our age range is from late twenties to early seventies. We are very different people. We gave and received from each other during that time in a way that for me was exceedingly rich, and in a way which

symbolises the nourishing potential that is held within the structure of the IPN — a nourishment that includes both support and acceptance, and the space and courage to question and challenge aspects of each other's behaviour and actions which we perceive might affect our practice as therapists, counsellors, people-workers. The spectre of denial just becomes less of a possibility. Openness to our own areas of need becomes more of a possibility. And I personally now think I have a pretty full sense of who the individuals in our link group are, what their strengths are, who they might work really well with, what areas are ripe for development — and feel confident that each of them practises with integrity, to the best of their abilities.

It is not necessary within the structure of the Network to spend this kind of time together. It is not a pre-requisite that all members of a group 'get to know' all members of a link group. It would be impractical. This process has just emerged for us organically, and it has been delightful. And the structure of the Network has provided the potential. Hooray!

Cal Cannon

