

EMOTIONAL ABUSE IN THERAPY

Introduction

Tone Horwood

When I was asked to write an introduction to these three pieces I was hopeful that I'd have something to say beyond an expression of shock and a couple of fairly obvious suggestions. However, I was and am still affected both by the crassness of the practice described and by the depth and longevity of the clients' pain.

But what to do? Can more be done to decrease the incidence of such behaviours? Humanistic psychology and its practitioners often pride themselves on being good at issues around power and equality, respect for the individuality of the person, and the client's right to determine the direction and pace of their therapy. In the case of AHPP, this is put clearly in the Code of Practice to which we are all required to subscribe. My belief is that this pride is well-placed and, with a look over my shoulder for the god of complacency, I feel relatively happy to say so in print.

Yet a Code of Practice is a statement of intent, not a guarantee, and sometimes we fall below the standards which we set for ourselves. Received wisdom, as I have it, says that a good enough personal therapy supported by equally good enough supervision will facilitate us in our facilitation of others, and that good gate-keeping by trainers and accreditors will ensure suit-

able entrants to this peculiarly demanding way of earning a living.

I am left wondering where, apart from the trust that we need to have in our own humanity and the ways in which we individually seek to preserve and develop it, we can be more prepared and vigilant in this area. Regular post-training supervision is where the best hopes lie at present but, as one of the authors points out, bad work can have within it a way of not getting to supervision. Perhaps those of us who supervise or train supervisors could think about contracts with supervisees that contain an obligation to declare all clients and to explore work with them on a regular and accountable basis. Perhaps ongoing personal work for therapists could be more widely insisted upon by accrediting organisations. Perhaps more attention could be given to contracts made with clients, in order to affirm or educate practitioners and to assure clients' rights to decent standards.

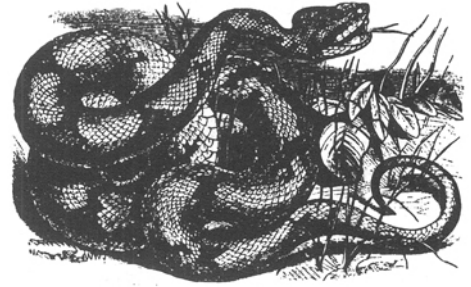
Once bad practice comes to light, I also hope we are moving in a positive direction in the way we deal with complaints. Whilst I can only speak of how AHPP, and to a limited extent of how the HIP Section of UKCP, goes about such things, my present desire is to try and minimise an adversarial

Tone Horwood is a psychotherapist and group facilitator who lives and works in Bristol. He is the Chair of the AHPP Ethics Committee.

approach whilst not avoiding the serious issues raised. I wonder if it would be possible to promote review and mediation as a preferred response, akin to those described in the following pieces, which would free up both client and worker to explore what went wrong in their interaction. Exploration, rather than complaint and retribution, might help us to create a climate where all but the grossest infringements might find a chance of resolution.

I wonder, too, if it might be worth considering, in the specific context of the examples offered below, whether 'abuse' is the most useful word to describe them. Not only is it a very emotive word (which doesn't encourage the exploration of such

behaviours), but I suspect that it blurs the distinction between considered acts of cruelty and violation and non-intentional, lesser acts, which have their roots in areas more readily amenable to growth, learning and healing.



When Therapists Fail Their Clients

Fiona and Emily

This article is about therapy going seriously wrong. It is not a diatribe against therapy itself — on the contrary, our subsequent therapy has been very healing. Our intention is to relate how our therapy with two particular therapists failed, and to raise questions about how this could have happened.

It took years for us to realise that we had been badly served. We thought that noth-

ing like this had ever happened to anyone else, and felt responsible for a shameful failure. We were therefore amazed to hear of a weekend entitled 'Workshop for women who have been emotionally abused by a therapist' run by two accredited therapists. It was a revelation for all of us. For the first time we felt our experience was being validated. There were many similarities, both in the form of the abuse we had suffered,

Fiona and Emily are two members of a women's client support group which was formed to explore the ways in which its members had been failed by their therapists. To preserve confidentiality, names and some identifying details have been altered.