

Dear S&S,

I would like to respond to John Rowan's review of Sue Gerhardt's book *Why Love Matters* in the last issue of S&S. I have a great deal of respect for John and his extraordinary contribution to the theory and practice of humanistic therapy over decades, and have appreciated many of his very thoughtful book reviews. However, this one sounded rather more dismissive than I feel comfortable with.

He begins his review with: 'In a way this is a brilliant book, and in a way it is a disappointment.' Apart from a couple of positive comments in the first and final paragraphs, however, he seems to be writing almost totally about the disappointment and I would like to have heard more about what he considered to be 'brilliant'.

To state my own bias, I loved this book and have recommended it to various people, including clients, supervisees, colleagues and friends, all of whom have been very positive. Among the things that I (and others) love are Sue Gerhardt's accessible language, her inclusion of women's direct experience of being mothers, her quoting from feminist writers, her challenge to some of the developmental theories (mostly from male writers) and to what she calls the 'demeaning' diagnostic language of so-called 'personality disorders' which seems to be becoming so widely accepted. I enjoy the way she links scientific theory and therapeutic thinking in a way that makes sense to me, even if I don't agree with all of it.

John says: 'I don't quite know who it is aimed at'. I believe it's 'aimed' at all the people he mentions as possible targets – mothers, psychologists, therapists – as well as ordinary every-day people who might be interested in learning more about how and why our brains develop in particular ways. On what does he base his belief that the amount of academic detail 'would be too much for most mothers'?

I am also curious about John's statement that attachment theory is 'quite trivial' and leads people into 'rather simplistic cause-and-effect thinking'. That would, of course, be possible – but surely no more so than a simplistic belief in Maslow's hierarchy of needs and theory of self-actualization, for example.

This humane and readable book seems to me to offer a fascinating insight into recent findings in neuroscience and biochemistry in a way which I can understand and relate to. As Sue Gerhardt says in her introduction: 'As these disciplines (neuroscience, psychology, psychoanalysis, biochemistry) begin to communicate and to influence each other, they are offering a deeper understanding of how human beings become fully human and how they learn to relate emotionally to others.'

Christine Bell

Consultancy and Training - Psychotherapy and Counselling

Dear S&S

What a heart-warming piece Jenny Mosley wrote on Forgiveness - always my 'hot topic,' sometimes hotter than others, like now. I found myself reading about far more than teachers of school children; I discovered that forgiving is a teaching act in the wider world as well. Forgivers feel their hurt feelings, survive them, then manage to find, and offer, compassion, love, understanding, in effect be 'bigger than the behaviour that's just scalded you.' This I can do as counsellor; this I find hardest in relation to my own mother. Why's that? Children in school are children; clients, by their very nature, are open-hearted enough to be there, implying a desire to learn. My mother is an adult, (I'm not responsible for her inner child, except perhaps for my part in collective responsibility) and resistant to learning, (if I'm afraid too, I'm also intrigued, and tenaciously explore this subject.)

Jenny calls teachers superhuman. I think teachers of children, and of those open to learning, get pushed to the edge of their humanness. I think persevering teaching, forgiveness of, those refusing to learn is indeed superhuman, and that's God's job. I can at least forgive myself, give myself permission, with compassion, for being just human.

Jane Barclay

Counsellor, Exeter

In our last issue (Vol 32 No6 Feb – Mar 05) we printed a letter from David Jones which read in part:

Dear S&S

Psychotherapist as blank screen ...

Your issue Working with Refugees (Vol 32, 5 Dec 2004) deserves wide readership. Aida Alayarian (p42) refers to the 'blank screen traditionally adopted by psychoanalytic therapy' and, rightly in my view, rejects it as of little help to 'people who are ... reclaiming their lives after fleeing for safety.' I would go further and say it is always of little help to clients/patients who have experienced shocking events whether they have then fled geographically or in some other way. The modern client centred or humanistic formulation that I like goes like this (my words):

The therapist should be fully present and engage with the client but without becoming entangled. They should be aware of their own emotional state and inner process throughout a session as well as entering into and following the client's process and state of mind whilst at the same time holding the time and safety boundaries in place. To be present without becoming entangled requires an ability to feel pain without getting defensive against it. It also requires recognition that conscious interpretation is only one type of response a therapist can make and is often inappropriate.

I am sure this humanistic formulation could be better stated and I wonder what S&S readers think. I will draw this letter to the attention of some of the people who are prominent in the UKCP to see what they say.

David Jones (Psychotherapist, Retired)

Dear S&S

I have interpolated an addition to your formulation which my experience with supervisees working with refugees at the Minster Centre suggests is quite unavoidable.

'It is also sometimes necessary to recognise that when dealing with refugee clients in profoundly difficult legal and socio-economic situations actual alterations of the ordinary psychotherapeutic/counselling frame will sometimes be, at least temporarily, necessary, and that an element of an advocacy role may be part of this.'

Heward Wilkinson - Chair of the Humanistic and Integrative Section (HIPS) of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

Dear S&S

David asked me to give a brief comment on his letter. I think his statement (with which I am in total agreement) can be understood as an example of what I call Stage Three when it comes to the question of the role of the therapist in the therapy.

Stage One was the therapist (or, more accurately, the psychoanalyst) as expert. That's where the blank screen came in, to elicit material for authoritative interpretation. Countertransference consisted of the therapist's neuroses and resistances.

No one owns to working in a Stage One way any more but I have my doubts! Stage Two was a definite advance in that the therapist's subjective responses to the client, and the resultant creative use of self by the therapist, meant that the client's inner world could be accessed via the therapist's 'usable countertransference'.

Most therapists I know from all kinds of backgrounds are working in Stage Two ways and there is nothing fundamentally wrong with it. But there may be some unforeseen problems. To give a simple example, the idea that the therapist's depression is the client's depression (or an image of the client's depressed mother) cropping up in the therapist could leave out the therapist's actual depression (or his/her own depressed mother). The risk is of shoving the problematic material back into the client, thereby cleaning up the therapist. This is unacceptable, ethically and politically. (I tried to write about this in *The Political Psyche*)

In Stage Three work, as David says, the therapist's own subject position and affective state is understood as part of the relational field. It is ethically and politically much more satisfying and, I believe, more effective clinically. The best Stage Three work is being done by the relational psychoanalysts in the United States. People like Stephen Mitchell, Jessica Benjamin, Neil Altman, Lew Aron, Adrienne Harris, Muriel Dimen.

However, we have to question whether Stage Three is not, in fact, also where some schools of therapists *started* from. I am thinking of the Jungians and some humanistic practitioners. As far as the Jungians are concerned, there's Jung's famous one-liner that the analyst is 'in' the therapy just as much as the patient is.

Anyway, this brief communication is not intended to be more than an addition to David's letter and let's have a discussion about it.

Andrew Samuels – Jungian Analytical Psychologist

(* *The Political Psyche* (1993) by Andrew Samuels is published by Routledge and is available from Amazon Books – Ed)

Dear S&S

One of my comments is that this statement makes no reference at all to any non-verbal communication, body awareness, body language, etc. It is purely a 'therapeutic relationship' statement and whilst body awareness and non-verbal communication *might* be implicately inferred, since it often occupies as much as 95% of all communicative signals, I would prefer something more explicit to be stated. How about:

'The therapist should be fully present and engage with the client. They should be aware of all channels of communication, verbal, non-verbal, and body-oriented. They should observe and respond appropriately, but without becoming entangled. They should be aware of their own emotional state, their body and their inner process throughout a session as well as entering into and following the client's process, state of mind and body language. They should be assisting the client to explore their own forms of inner process, communication, and interaction, whilst at the same time holding the time, psychic space, and safety boundaries in place.

To be aware of the multi-level aspects of both self and other involves levels of meta-attention, without involvement.

To be present without becoming entangled requires an ability to feel pain without getting defensive against it. These also require professional recognition that unconscious signals, body language, energy and attention levels and so forth comprise the majority of communication signals between people: verbal communication is just a minimal part of these and is often over-rated and inappropriate.'

Yours

Courtenay Young – Psychotherapist and Treasurer UK Association for Humanistic Psychology Practitioners (UKAHPP a founder organisation of UKCP)

Over to you to continue the discussion.
Deadline for the next issue is April 28. Eds.