AHP(B)

The Association for Humanistic Psychology in Britain

AHP(B) is an organisation devoted to exploring the scope of human capacity and potential so as to enhance both the individual and society. It publishes Self & Society and other activities include lectures, workshops, conferences and special events. See the back of the magazine for a membership application form.

Self & Society publishes articles in the field of contemporary and humanistic psychology, particularly those concerning issues of personal development. The views expressed in Self & Society are not necessarily those of the editor or of the AHP(B). We welcome contributions, so please contact Maxine Linnell for an information sheet on preparing a manuscript for publication. Self & Society also welcomes advertising; see the back of the magazine for details.

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The UK Association of Humanistic Psychology Practitioners is closely associated with the AHP(B) and provides a directory of accredited therapists. UKAHPP is an independent, non-profit organisation for the accreditation of humanistic practitioners, leading to UKCP or UKRC registration. UKAHPP members retain freedom of choice and self-direction in their professional development.

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Special Edition on **Pink Therapy**

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**A Note on Self & Society Contents**

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Psychologies

‘Change how you feel not how you look’. It’s a new glossy monthly magazine, like Marie Clair or Cosmopolitan. It sits on the women’s shelves. That’s interesting. Is it a mistake? But no, the editorial says it. ‘Welcome to Psychologies, the first women’s magazine that’s about what we’re like, not just what we look like.’ So men are explicitly excluded. That’s a puzzle. Before I even get to the editorial, there are six pages of ads, for revitalising comfort cream, lingerie, and superdefense triple action moisturiser to ‘help prevent the visible signs of premature ageing’. And the ads go on. There are lots of them, all about how you look. Except for one, a phone that takes pictures. Probably of how you look.

At my age triple action hydratant superdefense cream would be a waste of money, time and syllables. Perhaps Psychologies is just meant for young women. There are articles on fear, anger, setting boundaries, introverts, positive thinking, how to say no, mothers, and ‘which you is the real you?’ It’s all good stuff, though relentlessly self-improving, and mostly about quick fixes. Then I get to thirteen beauty pages. Cosmetics, surgery, anti-ageing again. How you feel or how you look?

M Scott Peck

M Scott Peck died in September, aged 69. Christopher Reed wrote a rather disparaging obituary of him in the Guardian. ‘He made millions with his first book by advocating self-discipline, restraint, and responsibility – all qualities he openly acknowledged were notably lacking in himself.’ It is a puzzle – do we evaluate a book by the life of its author? I have certainly found some of Peck’s writing helpful and sometimes inspiring. Do teachers, writers, therapists, have to lead immaculate lives in order to be worth listening to? What is an immaculate life? Does a magazine have to be what it says it is to be interesting or helpful? If you have memories or reflections about Scott Peck, please send them in for a collection next issue - by 30th November.

A few S&S types have been having a lively discussion about Psychologies, and we’ve set up a new yahoo group to discuss topics that interest our members. To join us, drop me an email at editor@ahpb.org.uk

Maxine Linnell

Apologies

Our apologies to Peter Afford, whose details were left out of his article on focusing last time.

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Pink Therapy

New Perspectives on Sexual Minority Therapy

Foreword

Self AND Society – can we enjoy both?

Charles Neal and Dominic Davies

These are significant times for sexual minorities in the West and for relations between these minorities and the worlds of psychology and therapy. We are pleased to present this issue of Self & Society, which focuses on the relationship between these cultures, as we believe that there is much still to be addressed as well as progress to celebrate.

Contributors debate the self – and the ‘dispiritation’ which can result from disconnection from wider communities. We are shown some of the ways in which psychological and emotional damage arises from overused mechanisms of self protection developed in hostile climates. On the other hand we look at how these selves are grown and lived out within social contexts and articles here show that profound structural and attitudinal changes in society offer new possibilities for health.

And these changes are urgent. At a Royal Society of Medicine conference on Lesbian and Gay Health issues (June, 2005) it was reported that 80% of young people attending one delegate’s lesbian and gay youth group were
taking Prozac, many having done so for several years. In 2003, Professor Michael King and colleagues, in a special report for MIND, found that lesbians, gay men and bisexuals were more likely to have consulted mental health services and experienced higher levels of depression and substance misuse than heterosexuals. In 2005 Cordelia Galgut’s research into lesbians’ experiences of therapy showed that 83% of respondents felt it was important that their therapist disclosed their sexuality. Just over half (54%) of lesbian respondents found their heterosexual therapist helpful, but 96% reported a lack of understanding of lesbian lifestyle and culture.

Homosexuality was declassified as a mental illness by the World Health Organisation in 1993, so we expect that most experienced therapists (i.e. those in practice for more than a decade) may have been trained to see same-sex attraction as pathological. Few counselling and psychotherapy training courses actually provide much education in sexual minority psychology and therapy issues beyond helping students to explore their attitudes to gay and lesbian people (bisexuals and transgender people rarely get included). When ‘gay issues’ are taught, it is usually by one of the students rather than from an experienced therapist – the implication being that there is nothing much to learn about working with sexual minority clients; personal experience is sufficient qualification.

We wish to challenge this. The first volume of our ‘Pink Therapy’ trilogy, published a decade ago (1996), shows there is plenty to learn about minority sexualities and psychology. Subsequent books in the series began to fill an urgent lack of European theoretical and training materials (Vols 2 & 3, 2000). It is lamentable, however, that this work remains accompanied by so little else focussing professionally on these issues in Britain. The workshops and two year professional training programme in sexual minority therapy run by Pink Therapy Associates clearly address this continuing need, yet take-up of these trainings, especially by professionals who are not themselves members of minority sexualities, remains slow.

Why is it then that so few therapists are interested in improving the service they provide to their sexual minority clients? Andrew Samuels said at the 2004 Pink Therapy ‘Queer Analysis’ conference that any therapist not interested in learning more about current debates in queer therapy issues were ‘crap therapists’ as they were missing out on the next wave of radical thinking and practice in therapy. It can be argued that queer therapy stands now where feminist critiques did in the 70s and 80s in relation to these professions. We are challenging existing hierarchical thinking, the role of analytic neutrality, the uses of counter transference and self exposure, issues about the developmental influences of nature and nurture and so on.

This issue of Self & Society shows once again that sexual minority people are different from heterosexual people by virtue of their experience of exclusion outside the heteronormative paradigm.

Keith Silvester argues convincingly for a re-examination of the place of narcissism in gay male psychology and against mere political correctness in the place of properly considered ethical attitudes, while Dermod Moore explores how his training in psychosynthesis contributed to a reclaiming of his sexuality, which had previously been pathologised as ‘addictive’ or ‘compulsive’. He notes how gay men may be unconsciously engaged in a queer spiritual quest and practice. Both contributions relate to an experience of living in rejecting,
under-nourishing environments throughout our history.

Marcus Gottlieb’s poignant contribution on working with gay survivors of the British boarding school system also illustrates how this works against psychological health in this microcosm of wider society, yet is thankfully able to point to current changes here, too, in attitudes towards professional care and equality of respect. Leah Davidson reviews an excellent new guide for lesbian survivors of sexual abuse, another specific and hitherto neglected context.

Laurie Slade’s article on ‘Social Dreaming’ reports from a workshop at the Pink Therapy Queer Analysis conference and reveals how group anxieties shared in dreaming can become shaped into optimism and meaningful images of the future.

There has been much advancement in the position of sexual minority people in recent years and further gains are imminent. Spain and Canada have just voted to allow same sex marriages and the UK has introduced a Civil Partnership Act (2004) which, in December 2005, will see the first same sex couples being able to register their partnerships and have equal rights with married heterosexuals in matters of finance, property, inheritance, medical care, pensions, etc. The long overdue recognition of transgender people through amendment of their birth certificates to reflect their acquired gender has been made possible by the Gender Recognition Act (2004), and Gender Recognition Certificates are beginning to be received by transsexuals.

The Adoption and Children Act (2002) made provision for same sex couples wishing to adopt to do so. Regulations have been drawn up to support this and later this year we will see more equitable parenting procedures for increasing numbers of sexual minority families and we have in this issue Roz Pendlebury’s timely review of two new guides for parents.

We are optimistic that this journal will make a valuable contribution to the slowly growing body of literature into sexual minority therapy. Therapists need to be willing to recognise their sexual minority clients as ‘different but equal’ to their heterosexual peers. To do this effectively they need to have worked on their attitudes to each of the different groups that comprise the sexual minority rainbow and to increase their understanding of the social contexts and lived experiences of what it means to belong to sexual minorities today. There is now provision of all these opportunities and we hope that readers of this issue might feel inspired to take some of them up.

We look forward to the opportunity to meet with AHPP and AHP members next year in a workshop that will help therapists explore some of these issues and other communications from their client which might get Lost in Translation, a workshop which we hope to co-present with AHPP.

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This article arises from a workshop called ‘Narcissism Reflected’, run in London in February 2004 under the Pink Therapy seminar series. It had the purpose of opening up discussion on an area much neglected, but of crucial importance. I contend that this subject matter holds a lot of pain because, historically, one of the principal psychological assertions made against homosexuality was that it arose intrinsically from a narcissistic disorder. As a consequence, it has become difficult for the gay community to look at the issue squarely and dispassionately, not least therapists. In rejecting such assertions, the ‘baby has been thrown out with the bathwater’ and the subject has gone into its own closet. And in case the reader is wondering whether the word ‘cissy’ is derived from ‘narcissism’, the answer would appear to be not – according to Chambers Dictionary, it is a combination of Cecily (whoever she was) and ‘sister’.

I believe it is important, if not critical, to examine the relevance of the subject because, like any other section of the population, gay people suffer from ordinary human psychological and emotional wounds which give rise to narcissistic disturbances and behaviour affecting intra- and inter-personal relationships. Additionally, there is a sub cultural and sociological aspect, where the emphasis on such features as physical appearance and sexual expressiveness in a heavily commercialised gay world has created pressures, which foster self-centred and narcissistic character traits and behaviour. With the development of online contact and dating services, the tendency to commodify relations in terms of superficial characteristics has legitimised an easy-come, easy-go attitude to people. So there is an ethical dimension to raising the subject, and in setting the context in relational rather than purely individualistic terms.
Twentieth century psychology – and psychoanalysis in particular – has left a deep wound in gay culture by pathologising homosexuality per se, rather than addressing the psychosocial issues brought by gay people (let alone bisexuals and transgender people) in an unempathic society. As a consequence, it has become very hard for individual gay people to examine their legitimate developmental issues on a level playing field with heterosexuals. Steven Mendoza (1997) states the issue well: ‘Prejudice against homosexuality says that the homosexual can only take the object as a narcissistic projection and, in his primitive narcissistic organisation, can find the object only projectively, and hence homosexually’. In challenging this view, he explains how the heterosexual world conveniently projects its own shadow onto gay people amongst others: ‘There are our broken marriages, our damaged children, our perverse sexual fantasies, our sadistic acting out of rage transferred from the mother, our terrors of oedipal and paranoid reprisals… projected onto homosexuals, blacks, patients, colleagues, the adherents of different psychoanalytic ideologies and all other available persecuted out-groups ‘ (Mendoza, 1997).

**An Overview of Narcissism**

Defining the term narcissism can be problematic. We have an everyday, cultural use which people take to be self-centredness and an inability to see the world from anyone else’s perspective. We commonly meet this when others expect us to know what they are talking about, or we assume that others think the same way we do. Much of the time we take this to be annoying but harmless. Sometimes we might be offended, but not quite know why. We also have a more technical psychological perspective, where narcissism in either children or adults is traced back in developmental time to our drives and the way we handled early primary relationships in infancy. Within this perspective there can, nevertheless, be considerable variation in thinking on the subject as the history of psychoanalysis can testify. To these definitions, I would add two more.

Pathological narcissism, although arising out of the psychological perspective, requires a category of its own. We are talking here of control freaks and ‘operators’ who, although appearing socially well-adjusted, ultimately treat the rest of the world as pawns in their game – such people can be dangerous when they have organisational or political power as they can destroy whole cultures. Almas talks about this in the following terms: ‘As a personality structure, it is more deeply and strongly crystallized, and thus more rigid, than the character of the normal individual. The personality is crystallized around its disconnection from the depths of the soul’. (1996: 27). The reason why such people need a category of their own is that they usually present as ‘sub-clinical’ – in other words, they operate under a veneer of normality and social acceptability, and would not be seen dead inside a therapy room.

Finally, I would want to name social or cultural narcissism, which refers to the way our society, in the current epoch of civilisation, encourages us to treat others as moveable and expendable figures and tends to
legitimise the disposability of unwanted relationships. This also finds a home in the cult of celebrity, and presents a challenge for social theorists such as Lasch (1979) and Bauman (2003). This is all about social dystopia, Dante’s Inferno.

Posited against this collection of phenomena, the opposite of narcissism might be broadly termed relationality. This refers to our ability to perceive and experience the world in mutually reciprocal terms, where the other has an autonomous reality which is respected. In recognising that one’s actions have both cause and effect, relationality involves taking responsibility in a deeply moral way. This is rather like the paradigm shift away from seeing the earth as the centre of the universe. Within this perspective, the psychological issues are crucially important to the extent that we have enough free emotional capacity to extend beyond our self-needs for approval, emotional comfort and power. There is also no reason to suppose that gay people are any more or less constitutionally predisposed to be either narcissistic or relational – we all have to work on it!

Psychological theories themselves can be quite varied and complicated. Writing as recently as 1993, Symington remarks: ‘In the analytic world there is a tremendous confusion of tongues, and the result is that people are often talking at cross-purposes’ and he confesses ‘I believe that we psychotherapists have largely failed when it comes to narcissism’ (Symington, 1993: 8-9). And narcissism is not exactly a popular subject in all therapeutic modalities. For example, Heiller complains about the ‘dearth of publications’ on the subject in the Transactional Analysis literature and notes: ‘the words narcissism, narcissistic injury, narcissistic needs and narcissistic transference are frequently used...as though readers are somehow supposed to have implicit knowledge of narcissistic issues and their aetiology’ (Heiller 2004: 39).

In the workshop, I distinguished three psychological ‘discourses’ which each depend on one’s philosophical perspective. The first was classical drive theory. As we will see later, this view of human nature, essentially deriving from Freud, formed the basis of a lot of subsequent problems in interpreting homosexual experience. Drive theory may be said to look at the person from the standpoint of internal energies, generic to all human beings, which have to be directed and managed in certain ways if psychological maturity is to be achieved. The second discourse was object relations theory, broadly exemplified by a range of thinkers such as Fairbairn, Kernberg, Klein, Kohut, Masterson and Symington. Essentially, we are talking here of an attachment-separation problem, where narcissism may be considered a defence against abandonment depression. The infant idealises the self-object - usually the mother - and is unable to move beyond this to adapt to any other figure. Within this perspective, Kohut believed that the development of a healthy narcissism was essential to the building of self-esteem, otherwise the personality becomes impaired and the person oscillates between grandiose and enfeebled
positions. The third discourse may be described as more fundamentally existential, where the individual is exposed to experiences of something called ‘the void’ in terms having to be a separate self in consciousness. This existential void gives rise to a whole way of looking at psychopathology, most eloquently set out by Almaas (1996).

So, where did things go wrong? One of the key writers to chart the difficulties faced, particularly within the analytic tradition, has been Kenneth Lewes (1995). In tracing the changing ethos within the field, he notes that Freud was somewhat ambivalent towards homosexuality:

‘On the one hand, Freud’s own attitude toward homosexuality included a profound respect for the achievements of homosexuals as well as an interest in the way homosexuality threw a new light on more usual behaviours and orientations taken for granted. On the other hand, Freud subscribed... to cultural norms that defined healthy psychic and sexual functioning by the way it corresponded to historically contingent establishments and functions’ (p35).

But changes in thinking around a 1930s watershed started to confuse things. Lewes goes on to make an important observation: that there started to be an unfortunate confusion between what Freud called a ‘narcissistic object choice’, which was not in itself a pathology, and the primitive psychosexual stage of narcissism: ‘[Freud] was at pains to deny that narcissistic object choice was characteristic of narcissism, since for him the choice of any external object was not possible during narcissism’ (Lewes 1995: 63). In other words, the two discourses I mentioned earlier - drive theory and object relations - became entangled in their different uses of the term narcissism - one referring to a stage of development, the other to an object choice. Lewes contends ‘The most that can be legitimately claimed is that there is an innate tendency for homosexual object choice, when it is narcissistic, to drift toward more primitive narcissistic pathology’ (Lewes, 1995: 63). But this drift could equally be said of heterosexuality when the ego is under threat.

Lewes discusses the other principal nail in the coffin, prevalent in psychoanalytic circles in the middle years of the twentieth century: namely, that the persistence of homosexual object choice must be something to do with the non-resolution of the Oedipus complex, or a trauma driving someone to a psychosexual regression to the preoedipal stage. In dealing with this he makes the excellent point that ‘individual psychosexual development is not finally a function of the Oedipus complex alone but of it along with the peculiar psychosocial forces and the combination of instinctual drives and developed ego functions of the individual’s “constitution”’ (Lewes 1995: 66).

In pursuing the object relations theme, I would contend that we might usefully consider a spectrum of developmental wounds which can occur at different times and which either arrest emotional development or cause it to regress. Firman and Gila refer to this as ‘primal
wounding': 'any grandiose narcissism is not an inherent characteristic at all but the result of primal wounding. In fact, these self-centred parts of ourselves are none other than aspects of survival personality that developed in response to early empathic failures' (Firman and Gila 2002: 130). But Firman and Gila are at pains to point out that 'primal' does not simply refer to 'early' in a developmental sense: 'We call the effects of these empathic failures primal wounding, not because this wounding is early or primitive, but because it breaks this primal – that is, fundamental or essential – connection to the ground of our being' (Firman and Gila 2002: 122). And such breaks in a sense of continuity of being, although very powerful for a child, can also be devastating for adults. So this potentially frees us up from thinking of narcissistic wounding as purely an infantile phenomenon.

Richard Isay has done much to identify exactly when such wounds might occur for gay males. He particularly identifies the post oedipal rupture with the father, about the age of four or five, which damages the capacity for gay boys to love themselves and thus others, later: 'If the father withdraws because he sees something he labels as not masculine, or he withdraws because he senses our wish to get close to him, then damage is inflicted on the child' (Isay 1994: 34). Later, I shall suggest that we do not restrict ourselves to just the two stages of pre oedipal and oedipal, we should add two more: adolescent wounding and cultural wounding. Each of these wounds might be said to contribute to our experience and understanding of narcissism.

Although the primal wounding argument is very convincing in understanding the way emotional development gets stuck or regresses, writers such as Almaas take a more existential perspective by arguing:

'Since narcissism is present when the self is identified with anything other than essential presence, whenever we identify with a dimension of experience superficial to our essential presence, we are bound to acquire narcissistic traits. Therefore if we identify with the body, emotions or any mental content, we will experience some narcissistic qualities' (Almaas 1996: 26).
He goes on to argue that since all ego structures are based to some extent on identifications and impressions from the past ‘it is clear that the experience of ego cannot be devoid of narcissism’ (Almaas 1996: 26). So this includes pretty much everything that makes us individual. Almaas further argues that, in order to connect with ‘essential presence’ one would have to experience a degree of emptiness, or void, which can feel very threatening to the ego.

It naturally follows that, whether one sees narcissism as arising from various relational wounds, or simply from any separate-self experience of being an individual, then we are all in the same boat. All that differs between people would be the particular circumstances of their wounding, and their abilities to develop capacity for self-reflection. There is nothing intrinsic in any of the above to indicate that homosexuality per se is a wound, or to suppose that it is any more separative from ‘essential presence’ than heterosexuality.

The Walking Wounded

Yet there is something particular to the way many gay people adapt to their wounds, in our current society, which legitimates and aggravates narcissistic wounding. I would like to offer some ideas.

The first is a response to rejection in either early childhood, as described by Isay, or in adolescence. Consider the following type of scenario:

Sally sets up a date to meet a woman called Jo who she met through a website. She finds Jo very exciting from her photograph and initially looks forward to meeting her, taking great care to fix the meeting arrangements. On the day, she sends a text message to cancel the date, giving some invented reason.

There are two possible ways of looking at this ‘hit and run’ tactic from the standpoint of a narcissistic trait. Firstly, Sally is so frightened of being rejected by Jo, that she feels the need to reject first to save herself from what could feel like the greater wound. The second possibility is that her real intention has been, perhaps unconsciously, to prove that she has the power to attract someone – and not to follow it through to an actual meeting. This issue of needing to know one has power may well be a response to earlier, younger experiences of powerlessness in either childhood or adolescence.

This leads on to a second idea, that rules of relational, social engagement were not acquired at crucial stages of development, such as adolescence. If legitimate gay relationship was beyond the pale at a time when the socially expected norm was ‘boy meets girl’, then how would any rules be acquired? Who would make them? If I look back at my own socialisation experience in the 1970s, the message I generally received from much of the gay subculture was one of individualism where the rules related more to how I could get sexual needs met, rather than how I could learn to treat people respectfully. In other words, in the effort to assert and advance gay freedom and expression, the subculture tended to legitimate treating people selfishly – there were few gay daddies around to say otherwise.
If anything, this amoral approach to human relationship has been exacerbated by what Zygmunt Bauman refers to as the Liquid Modern age. In talking of love and romance, he comments acerbically:

‘When guided by wish (‘your eyes meet across a crowded room’), partnership follows the pattern of shopping and calls for nothing more than the skills of an average, moderately experienced consumer. Like other consumer goods, partnership is for consumption on the spot...first and foremost, it is eminently disposable.... If found faulty or not “fully satisfactory”, goods may be exchanged for other, hopefully more satisfying commodities.... Any reason why partnerships should be an exception to the rule?’ (Bauman 2003: 12-13).

Consider the following counselling vignette from the not too distant past:

Darren describes arranging to meet someone called Simon, who he has never seen, in a gay pub, based on a phone contact. When Darren gets there, he stands at the far end and observes someone who he guesses to be Simon, walk in. Darren realises he does not fancy him, and walks out of the pub without making any contact. Darren seems to think this is socially acceptable behaviour.

Now, can the counsellor reasonably make no ethical judgement about this? And if so, should something be said to the client? My view is that, from the standpoint of addressing a deficiency in the client’s relational development, it is reasonable for the counsellor to challenge this behaviour on the grounds that another human being is being hurt or discounted by such an action.

Michael Bennett locates the role of the therapist, in relation to the healing of narcissistic tendencies, in terms of ethics and purpose:

‘In the late stages of psychotherapy the therapist is helping the client to develop a critique of the client’s rewritten narrative of the self. The therapist helps the client evaluate the new story in terms of its coherence, truth, authenticity and morality. Inconsistencies, gaps and blind spots are challenged.... The presenting problem that the client brings represents a break in his ability to maintain equilibrium and development. From the client’s point of view this rupture is a source of suffering; from the therapist’s point of view this is an opportunity to protect the unseen evolutionary process. This is a primary purpose of counselling and psychotherapy and it entails the counsellor holding a fundamental moral and ethical position on behalf of the client, with or without the client’s knowledge or permission’ (Bennett 2005: 127-128).

Conclusion

My observation is that ‘politically correct’ therapy culture has now cottoned-on to the idea that ‘gay’ does not mean ‘good’ at all costs. It is possible to identify, empathise with and appreciate the narcissistic wounds of gay people as they present in therapy, without going down the route of pathologising homosexuality itself. I believe it is possible to highlight and challenge narcissistic patterns and
disturbances without having to suffer the charge of homophobia. It is also important to recognise that there is a tremendous spectral range of psychological, emotional and moral development among gay people. Gay therapists have a particularly important role to play in opening up dialogue around the historical issues that have made narcissism a taboo no-go area for the gay subculture. – whether this is a debate about the politics of social relating, or the ethics of unsafe sexual practices. This will give permission to non-gay-identified therapists and supervisors to do the same.

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Keith Silvester is an integrative psychotherapist, supervisor and trainer, and is Director of Programmes at the Psychosynthesis & Education Trust in London. Trained originally in community work, he is a past convenor of London Friend, a telephone counselling service for LGBT people. More recently, he was Head of Student Counselling at Central School of Speech and Drama. He is an associate of Pink Therapy Services and a contributor to the Pink Therapy book series.
In the past five years I have worked in groups with about 40 fellow boarding school survivors and I have corresponded, spoken and shared experiences with dozens of others. More recently, I have worked as a psychotherapist with around twenty, most of whom have been gay, lesbian or bisexual. It was in September 2004 that I started to run workshops, the subject of this article. These were designed specifically for gay men, like myself, who felt that their boarding school experience was difficult to come to terms with and had had a long-term negative impact.

At that point it was exactly ten years since I had entered therapy. When I started that journey, I was unaware that my anxiety, isolation and sense of failure were linked to my schooling. Since then, I have oscillated between anger about the damage done to me and insistence that I have little genuinely to complain about. Struggling with this duality is common. Boarders can buy into the myth that we were special and fortunate. It is a tenacious introject. I find it less painful, less shameful, to ‘defend my parents’ and maintain the story that I was happy, than to admit that my daily reality at school was tedium and torment. If I do voice my real feelings, I may do so apologetically.

The major selling point of boarding schools is that they instil ‘character’, self-confidence and self-reliance. I think this claim deserves to be questioned. It is probably true that boarders can grow into competitive and domineering adults, and these are qualities well rewarded in our society. However, the cost in many cases is surely too great, in terms of the trauma of early abandonment and institutionalisation, the symptoms of which are clearly seen in adults who are hardened, pressurised, do not permit themselves normal human weakness or failure, and are resistant to loving and being loved.
Nurturing parents know that their children are dependent on their protection and love. They set boundaries to contain their children and support them to become gradually less dependent, by individuating, by making choices and developing their adult form. Crucially, this is an organic process that needs to be at a pace appropriate to the individual. Boarding can be damaging because it takes parents and family out of the picture and substitutes premature independence, combined with dependency on the school, an overweening, ersatz authority. An institution is not designed to meet a child’s emotional needs, and the child may conclude that their emotions are unimportant or a mere nuisance.

It is important that more therapists are aware of the scars that ex-boarders may carry, very often hidden from view. ‘Now that I realize’, one client said to me, ‘that my problems of low self esteem, depression, fear of intimacy and difficulty with relationships are classic by-products of the boarding experience, I feel that much of my previous therapy was wide of the mark.’ The surface the client presents can be quite polished and urbane. When I myself meet other ex-boarders, I tend to connect through humour and am skilled at appearing confident and tough; I have to show that I survived. I was conditioned from childhood not to ask for emotional support, nor to share unhappiness. To talk about my needs or vulnerability at boarding school would have been unthinkably ‘sissy’ or ‘soft’ - especially taboo given my awareness at some level of being gay.

The key thing to note is that, at an early age, we had every significant relationship abruptly, unnecessarily cut off. Mothers, fathers, siblings, cousins, grandparents, friends, pets, home, neighbourhood, community were suddenly lost. (I use the word ‘unnecessarily’ advisedly: of course there are rare exceptions where family life is so dysfunctional that boarding comes as a relief by comparison.) The breach of relationships has implications, for example, when an ex-boarder grows up and comes out to his family; the healthy connection, which might support a person in the process of coming out, has already been radically broken. Not surprisingly, ‘nesting’ and the security of a home can feel extremely important and healing, and many of us have found new communities and ‘families of choice’ which have gone some way to filling the gap left by the rupture in our childhood.

A vital part of the healing work is making the effort to imagine - or to remember, if we are ex-boarders - the shock felt by the child on first arrival at school. In a sense, that is to make contact with the child before he adapted to his new environment and shut down his authentic, feeling part. ‘I didn’t complain to my parents’ is the message I hear from ex-boarders when asked to recall their first hours at school, ‘Because that would have let them down.’ This is a very wrong thing for a child to have been taught. To be vulnerable or powerless should not invite contempt, and to need love and reassurance is human and natural.

The child who arrives at boarding school is well aware that his parents,
having invested a great deal in the success of this project, expect him to be calm and courageous. Resourcefully, he may come up with a piece of double-bind reasoning which runs something like this: 'I am privileged to have been sent away from home, I’m lonely and I’m dying to be touched and comforted but I’m not going to ask for that, my parents have sacrificed themselves and sent me away because they love me, and I know that they love me because they tell me so, therefore the experience that I am aware of having is not real, or is not to be trusted, or there is something wrong with me. It is not possible to imagine that my parents have been selfish, cruel or ambitious for themselves. I must be ungrateful, undeserving, rotten to the core.'

At the same time the child puts an immense, instinctive effort into not crying, disciplining and deadening himself, strangling his throat, tightening his chest and restricting his breathing so as to hold back his tears and shut off the waves of his grief and homesickness. This way of using himself becomes habituated, and is evident both when I work with adult ex-boarders and when I reflect on my own somatic self-organization. It becomes what the child, and then the adult, recognizes as his identity. It corresponds to what Nick Duffell has termed the ‘strategic survival personality’.

Duffell quotes a client as once having said to him, ‘I became a strategic person, always on the lookout for danger and how to turn every situation to my best advantage. I still do it. It’s exhausting. I don’t know how to stop doing it.’ This fits with my own experience and also what people have reported to me.

One of the manifestations of the ‘survival personality’ is extreme poles of control and chaos. ‘I look to all the world as if I’m fully in control, but inside me is turbulence’, one person said to me. ‘I try to deal with everything on my own, won’t let anyone help me. ‘It seems important to act competent, and not to feel one’s own chaotic feelings. Several people have told me of ‘seeking refuge in work’, over-committing or over-extending themselves, being addicted to work and/or to the abuse of drink, drugs, food or sex. Life feels shortened, because they do not allow themselves to stop and breathe.

I increasingly connect this squeezing of time to the conditioning of school timetabling. A non-boarding youngster typically luxuriates in free, unregulated time, whenever he or she is at home and particularly at weekends for example. This can almost be seen as the teenager’s developmental task, to ‘hang out’, as they wait for their adult identity to form itself. It is hard to convey to someone who has not grown up under a tight, institutional regime, what it is like to have no moment which is not precisely allocated to one demand or another, every space filled lest, heaven forbid, the pupil have some self-contact, and access to some emotion be it sadness, anger or lust. I do not know to what extent this pertains today, but it was certainly formerly part of the process of teaching pupils to keep marching on, putting up with whatever
privations and self-denial might be required.

Thus boarding school survivors tend to be stoic and ever-enduring. They have been ‘trained to put up with a lot’, as a workshop participant expressed it to me. They are inclined to deprecate the information in their body about their needs, impulses, appetites and preferences. They often lack a subtle, sensitive feel for their own boundaries. The structures of traditional boarding school actively discourage the normal, organic exploration and discovery of boundaries. ‘There are rules for everything’, one client told me, ‘and you won’t get far if you question them, however eccentric. You cannot go here, you mustn’t go there, but there is no way you can stop people from invading your private space. In fact, there isn’t any privacy. It’s like the army, but for immature, impressionable children’.

Another said, ‘I can never belong to anything, because for so many years I was forced to belong to the school. I wore their uniform, obeyed their rules, jumped out of bed and went running to the chapel or the refectory whenever they rang their bell. ‘And poignantly this person added, ‘I would rather live like a hermit than have anyone ever tell me what to do and when to do it.’

Boarding schools seem to produce compliant conformists and sabotaging rebels, both externally referenced. Both types are reactive to their environment, rather than responsive to themselves. Sometimes both co-exist as sub-

*Greasy Pole - David Shenton*
personalities within the same individual. I am aware of this dichotomy in myself and watch for it in the therapy room. Up to a certain point, one can expect the client to comply or co-operate, but, sooner or later, the rebel side asserts him or herself, absolutely refusing to be moulded and very happy to ‘cock a snook’. I see this not as ‘resistance’ to be overcome, but as an attempt to make a personal boundary, which I will support in any way that I can, for example by facilitating the client to express, and to have a bodily experience of, their anger. It is part of the process of developing their sense of self, which was disturbed by being separated from home.

Men who were sent away at a variety of ages, from seven up to about fourteen, have attended my workshops. They were at boarding school from the 1940s through to the early 1990s, so pre-Wolfenden Report up to the era of Section 28. They include men who did, and men who did not, identify as gay when they were at school, and others who had at least a dim awareness of their gayness. Some are still uncertain of their sexual orientation. Some had sexual relations at school, and this was not always consenting. All were at single-sex boarding schools, and all experienced their schools as profoundly homophobic environments. Their parents, in some cases disappointed by their failure to align with male gender norms, had no doubt sent them away, in part, to ‘make a man of them’. They went to a place where silence around gayness suggested a real sense of dread. Sex was punishable by expulsion - the threat of a second exile - and only took place under pretence of machismo and coldness. My memory, and generally that of the people I have worked with, is of repressive, austere, joyless institutions from which everything tactile, sensual or voluptuous was deliberately excluded. ‘Ironically, there was plenty of sex in the Latin poetry that was force-fed to us,’ one man pointed out, ‘but I kept myself safely emasculated and ignorant of what it really meant. “Amo” was just a verb to be conjugated’. Masculinity was policed from the outside and self-policing. ‘If you were identified as a ‘cock watcher’ or a ‘perv’, at the very least you were derided and threatened. ‘Some attempted to keep themselves safe by adopting an exaggeratedly firm handshake, with no hint of a limp wrist, and doing whatever else they could to pass themselves off as heterosexual.

The author Paul Monette, a gay boarding school survivor, firmly believed for years that sex and love could not co-exist. ‘As long as I kept them apart, love would be sexless and sex loveless, endlessly repeating the cycle of self-denial and self-abuse’. Several clients have indicated their aversion to intimacy. This can manifest as engaging in furtive or dangerous sexual activities, obsessing about an unavailable partner, or withdrawing and isolating all together. Others report anxiety and/or physical tension that prevent a satisfying and pleasurable experience of sex within a loving relationship, which may be because sexuality has been split off from the rest of the personality.
‘I yearn for a sustained, warm, intimate relationship’, one gay ex-boarder told me. His behaviour, however, shows as contradictory and ambivalent. It would seem that, in common with other ex-boarders, he avoids anger, conflict, play, spontaneity, weakness, and being open to possible rejection - all constituents of intimacy. ‘It is almost like an allergic reaction, whenever I get close to a possible partner, or even think about intimacy’, another client has reported.

If and when they do get into intimate relationships, survivors relate to their partner in a controlled and controlling manner. ‘It’s the difference between being committed with all my heart and soul, being passionate and honest, and saying what I’m thinking, or, on the other hand, always making calculations and judgments about what I’ll get away with’, one man explained. ‘I want to ensure that he doesn’t leave me, and also that he doesn’t discover the truth about me, how bad I am - this is an absolute ‘must’, I will do anything to achieve it’. To me, this has the flavour of real, urgent, life-and-death need for survival, the ‘strategic survival personality’ in action. Honesty, empathy and sharing may appear to be present in the relationship, but at some level it is a masquerade. The ex-boarder is playing a secret, clever game - a ‘role’, a ‘pretence’, as some described it to me - censoring his true thoughts and feelings, clinging to his partner while passing himself off as a secure and confident person. After all, he got a lot of practice ‘passing off’ at boarding school.

Sometimes it needs to be explained to ex-boarders that what they have been engaged in is a pretence of loving. As survivors, they have learned to care mainly or exclusively about themselves, whereas having a real, gratifying, loving relationship involves action and effort. ‘I know that I will be really healed when I can make love to, with, for and about my partner’, someone movingly said to me.

Relationships require us to manage both closeness and distance, to regulate our contact and ourselves. The people I have worked with find this difficult. To anyone who has not been at a traditional boarding school, or has not had an analogous experience of complete abandonment, missing an absent friend or lover is a manageable experience. Some survivors, on the other hand, find it intolerable to hold the other at a distance. Separating from the other is like being emptied out. Better to switch off loving feelings, than attempt to cherish and sustain them in absentia. That is the dilemma. ‘After the experience of being incarcerated at school, literally counting out the days, months and years’, one person said to me, ‘it’s just too painful to let myself miss my partner’. Missing and longing have to be abolished as experiences, and endings or transitions erased. Thus there is no continuous thread of relationship; each new meeting entails starting afresh. This is something a therapist needs to keep feeding back to his client about, finding ways to support a sense of continuity of relationship, until hopefully in time the client begins to
have feelings about it and makes different choices.

Quite often, survivors move between extreme poles of closeness and aloofness, impulsiveness and caution, in a way that others can experience as teasing or confusing. I have experienced myself being absolutely determined not to get close to anyone and then, if occasionally I did, being equally determined to cling to the other as if it were a matter of life and death for me. This is connected with the poor sense of boundaries and insubstantial sense of self that characterise the survivor. We cannot get and stay close to another person, and in right relationship with ourselves, if we do not know where we end and they begin. In order to stay, we need to know that we are whole, and that we are free to leave.

The workshops have been quite unique gatherings. It is unusual to invite a group of gay ex-boarders to come together on the basis of their common history. The discovery that one is not alone can be transformative. One thing that has struck me forcibly about the participants has been their truthfulness, their strong appetite for contact and connection with one another, and their evident delight in finding a safe place to share their stories, their feelings and their reflections on the ways in which boarding has impacted on their adult lives. The feedback has been that they have felt lighter, liberated, relieved of a burden, unblocked, stronger, and more in touch with their own sadness and gentleness, having had an opportunity to get to know others who survived a similar childhood experience. Men who are used to hiding, feeling small or invisible in groups of other men, report having had a powerfully different experience on the workshops, after breaking their silence about their hurt and anger. They were willing to give to each other, and receive from each other, affection, appreciation and acceptance, which they might ordinarily find intolerable. For me it has been key to reverse the efficient suppression of emotion, which was supported by the boarding experience. Ex-boarders can flirt with feelings but then briskly move on. Working with them, it is important to let them have space for their feelings. In particular, they are entitled to feel rage, and it needs airing at some time. In that way, they can come to a place where they feel clear, and can celebrate themselves and feel proud rather than ashamed.

I want to acknowledge that boarding schools are beginning to move with the times. Whether they are any more than ‘children’s care homes’ for the ‘privileged’, even now, I will leave for others to judge. For some outgoing fourteen or fifteen year-olds, the experience of boarding might be a life-enhancing adventure. For the younger ones, I can only express some relief and pleasure that there tend to be more frequent and longer visits home, more fluid interaction with parents and friends, mobile phones and email to stay in touch with, and counsellors and other sources of confidential and sensitive support. I am told that the modern
curriculum generally includes discussion about sexuality, feelings and relationships, that the competitive ethos is softening, that there is a kinder, less authoritarian, less bullying atmosphere. In today’s boarding schools, I am informed, to be gay no longer automatically means to be ashamed and invisible. Thus, the worst effects of separation from family are being mitigated, though those whose parents are distant, whether geographically or emotionally, will continue to struggle, as will those who are first sent away at a young age. The younger the child, the more likely it is that removal from family life, parental care and all the attachments of home will preclude them getting what they need in terms of reassurance, safety and acceptance - in a word, love.

Acknowledgement

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my debt to the great pioneer in the field of boarding school survival work, Nick Duffell, whose ideas and experience underpin and provide a framework for my thinking, and who has taught me that the deep wound to our souls deserves recognition and honouring. I also give warm thanks to Richard Nickols, who joined me in facilitating the Spring 2005 workshop.

Further Reading
The Association of Boarding School Survivors is contactable at P.O. Box 3027 Brighton BN1 2BZ or via www.abss.org.uk and for information on Nick Duffell’s workshops see www.boardingschoolsurvivors.co.uk

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I was not brought up in a strict Catholic household; I had a liberal non-religious education, unusual at the time in Ireland. But during adolescence, as my hormones erupted, volcanically, I found myself cruising and having lots of sex; I also found myself, one particular Lent, drawn to going to Mass daily, finding comfort in ritual, and the peaceful atmosphere I found there. It was a space to reflect, to work things out, move towards an adult relationship with my spirituality, with my self, to tentatively say ‘hello’ to God. But when I heard the priest pontificate on the ‘grave moral disorder’ of homosexuality, I instantly knew that I could not stay. Apart from funerals, I have not been back to a Mass since. The first cut is the deepest.

In my forties now, I know that strongly sexual phases often go hand-in-hand with a spiritual awakening; but, alas, there was not that sort of wisdom available to me when I needed it back then. In a way, I believe I threw the baby out with the bathwater, when I abandoned religion, and I’ve been hankering after it ever since. Fiercely political and anti-clerical for many years, I began to gingerly work my way back towards a relationship with the numinous, the sacred, but it had to be on my own terms. Initially, this came about through my work as an actor in Tom McIntyre’s plays at the Abbey Theatre; later, a friend handed me a book by Liz Greene on psychological astrology, and an interest in Jungian psychology bloomed, which resonated with me as if I had already known it. But, in my late twenties, I encountered a similar shock of alienation and rejection to that which I experienced as a teenager at Mass: I was told that I
would not have been accepted as a candidate for training as a Jungian analyst, for the same profoundly unjust reason: my sexual orientation.

As a Kinsey 6, with a persistent inner knowledge that my being gay was an essential, unmovable, and vital part of my identity, I floundered around, depressed, unable to reconcile the split in me between spirit and flesh. Whatever familiar Irish Catholic shame I felt about my sex life was now compounded by something far more modern and insidious and toxic: apparently, I was psychologically flawed. I moved to London when I turned thirty, and despite what I learned about myself through the complex and beautiful language of astrology, I was finding it difficult to come to a sense of self-acceptance. I yearned for a relationship to prop up my shaky sense of gay identity, which, of course, does not generally bring about success in love. My astrological map may have shown me which way to go, but I had no idea how to travel there.

It was a joke that began my real healing journey. I was at the Psychosynthesis and Education Trust in London Bridge in 1996. I was jittery and suspicious, full of rage and fear, having dragged myself there to do the Essentials, the week-long introductory self-development course. On the last day, much relieved and a little hoarse, (I had done a lot of shouting), while posing for the celebratory group photograph, one of the trainers, Judith Firman, made a point of standing at the back beside me and a couple of lesbians, and quipped, *sotto voce*, ‘I’m with the queers’. With one deliciously timed joke, she came out; we all laughed, I was hooked, and healed, and welcomed. I knew that if ever I was going to find my place in the world, trembling as I was on the tectonic fault lines between sex and faith and psychopathology, I felt that such a joke, delivered so lightly by Judith, could only have been the fruit of some deep inner work. Therefore, I knew instinctively that something similar could happen to me. It was the beginning of a journey that was to take me eight years. One tutor in particular, Angie Fee, who taught sexuality and psychopathology at the Trust right through my training, provided me with a space to think things through that was fertile and open and fearless, modelling a way of working that I hold dear to this day.

But I had to go through the darkness first to get out the other side. ‘The soul is in the symptom’ is axiomatic of psychosynthesis - a holistic principle that can turn notions of allopathic psychopathology on its head, very similar to the Jungian alchemical search for the riches of individuation in the shadow. For if it is pursued, honestly, without prejudice, the end result may not be something that fits in with normative ideas of psychological maturity; it may for some, like...
me, result in the greater acceptance of behaviour which is transgressive, perhaps anarchic, and outside the pale. This, to me, is a comforting notion - for if psychotherapy was about turning unhappy rebels into complacent conservatives I would have nothing to do with it. Society can only be changed if anger at its faults can be channelled productively; an army of angry rebels has, arguably, never been more necessary.

The flexible and dynamic model of understanding the psyche, in psychosynthesis, is that of subpersonalities - identifying the cast of characters in our personalities, through guided imagery or dreamwork or gestalt chairwork, exploring which ones tend to dominate, attempting to understand the underlying needs and qualities of each, and working towards co-ordination and, ultimately, synthesis. As an actor, this makes intuitive sense to me. I know I have in me, among others, a strong rebel, a fierce critic, a very sexual cruiser, and, perhaps oddly, a nun - indeed subpersonalities often come in polarised pairs, symbolising a split that may need attention. When working in this way, with a soft touch and a kind guide, we can come to some empathic understanding of what each part of us is seeking, especially that which seems to make our lives a misery. Over time, these figures grow and change; I now understand and appreciate the creative, imaginative aspects to my cruiser, indeed recognise his (my) quest as being a pagan, spiritual one; as much as I now recognise my inner nun, far from being a figure of starched disapproval, to be a jolly mixture of Julie Andrews and a Sister of Perpetual Indulgence.

I’ve come to realise that, as in most things, the judgments we make about our behaviour matter enormously, and if they are severely critical, as they usually are about sex in our culture, they serve to compound and exacerbate shame and distress, instead of alleviate them. The more polarised we are inside, as a general rule, the more tortured we are, the less accepting we are of ourselves. And when we fight against self-acceptance, we alienate ourselves from others, increase a sense of isolation, get depressed, and make the likelihood of forming meaningful relationships diminish. It’s a vicious circle.

With some struggles, this process is very difficult. If someone is drinking excessively, and their behaviour while drunk has damaged relationships, caused them to lose their jobs or their home, then the part of them that wants to drink, that drags them to the off-licence in the morning as if on auto-pilot, is hard to deal with neutrally. Self-destruction on that scale can’t be condoned, and must be stopped in order to get support and allow some
healing, some thinking, to be done. This is why abstinence programmes such as Alcoholics Anonymous can work so well to save lives - zero-tolerance of suicidal behaviour is required, and the part that wants to drink cannot be allowed to.

But the problem with the AA model is that it works by re-enforcing shame around the desire to drink, classes it as a manifestation of disease, and any attempts to try to look at the ‘drinker’ as a subpersonality, in a non-judgmental and empathic way, are deemed to be evidence of denial - a heresy. Once sober, the problem drinker can spend the rest of their life carrying around a profound level of shame, that is only alleviated by a surrender to a spiritual programme that is remarkably similar to the Christian discourse, in which sinners seek absolution through confession to a third party. It’s a life sentence of focussing one’s life on one’s sin/shame/disease, one in which relapses are proof that one has failed, and also, unconsciously, evidence that one belongs. For many people, it works - especially those who are comfortable with the Christian paradigm, and for whom drinking has become so compulsive it cannot be dealt with in any other way. But, often, (and I know this from having worked as an alcohol counsellor for three years) the deeper meaning behind the desire to drink, the purpose it serves to escape from a hurt or to allow the expression of otherwise buried feelings, is not explored, because one cannot allow that drinking could serve any good purpose. And we need to recognise that good purpose in order to try and figure out healthier ways of achieving it. When it comes to sex, it is deceptively easy to apply the 12-step model of addiction to those who have a lot of it, and are unhappy. For a couple of years, early on in my training at the Trust, I believed I was a sex addict, and sought help for my problem through 12-step groups, believing I had found redemption, a spiritual path in recovery. But it served to reinforce my shame around matters sexual (which took some doing) and, for a while, I believed that sex was the problem, that there was something badly wrong with me for wanting it so much. My cruiser subpersonality was in the dock, guilty as charged, guilty as sin. Lock him away and throw away the key. I experienced a severe period of clinical depression around that time, hopefully never to be revisited. Something was badly wrong.

For many heterosexual men with partners, struggling with their use of prostitutes or pornography, for example, a sex addiction programme with a zero-tolerance stance on sex outside marriage often serves to help them to remain faithful to the women in their lives, and so keep families together, and
reinforces traditional social mores. If an entire family agrees that a father and husband’s philandering is shameful, and it accords with general cultural and religious values, then it is hard - or perhaps simply folly - for a married man to consider his sexual adventuring in any other light. But I, as a gay man, without a partner or family, and with a healthy lack of interest in upholding traditional mores, had no such reinforcement. As my sexual life continued, floridly, abundantly, relentlessly, and my depression deepened, compounded by a sense of failure, of sickness, I began to wonder if it was the shame that was the problem, not the sex.

As with so many aspects of our society, homosexuality is a phenomenon that is causing us to re-examine many established norms. From property and tax law to the institution of marriage, from established religion to health education, from the military to psychotherapy, the ascendance of the Stonewall generation is testing and changing our values, challenging our understanding of human nature. And so it is with ideas around addiction.

The link between addiction and spirituality is well established in our culture. 12-step groups offer a ritualised spiritual fellowship that encourages a relationship to God, an acceptance of the principle of surrender in the face of the inevitable, and a forensic examination and confession of character defects (read: sins) as a way of encouraging a sense of well-being. But for many gay men, we have ritualised a different route to the spiritual, to the transpersonal, and that is through sex.

In his understanding of our dream life, our unconscious, Carl Jung referred to a *temenos* as ‘a piece of land, often a grove, set apart and dedicated to the god.’ For many men, cruising areas, which are as a rule invisible to the uninitiated, act as a space where age-old rituals of sex are enacted by men in search of an experience that is not connected to the love of a particular person, but for the experience of sex in all its variety, imagination, sensory pleasure, adventure, intensity and repetition, according to intuitive rules of engagement, evoking (or invoking) experiences of the numinous, the transcendent, in every encounter. In other, especially Oriental cultures and religions, the phallus is revered as a manifestation of the divine, like Shiva’s *lingam* - in the west, where it is shamed, it is left to the queers communing in the parks to honour it. For, of course, it is not that we worship the six-inch piece of flesh, *per se*, it is that it carries a projection, a charge, a sense of power, or some may say an *illusion* of power. Entering a cruising area - and in this day and age it’s not only a literal grove, but a corner of cyberspace or a basement of
a bar - has a frisson that is hard to explain to those who haven't experienced it. It's a crossing over the threshold to the unconscious realm, very dreamlike, very exciting, sometimes numbing, full of infinite possibility and fantasy, a yearning to connect to some collective sense of fraternal (paternal?) communion, a magick of sorts.

In classical mythology, the god that ruled over such sacred/profane spaces was Dionysus, the god of transgression and release, of drunkenness and ecstasy. He had his role to play, his rightful place in the pantheon. But the paradox of Dionysus is that in order for there to be some transpersonal charge to the transgression, a sense of breaking the rules, there has to be something to transgress in the first place. Which is why those of us with parental figures still reigning supreme in our inner landscape, severe, condemning inner critics, who serve to dole out shame on our animal, instinctive sexual drives, are often those for whom the desire to indulge in Dionysian rites is overwhelming, compulsive. The priest's shadow, his counterpart, without whom he is incomplete in archetypal terms, is the rampantly out-of-control pervert; the attempt to transcend the fleshly devilish realm and live in the spirit world invokes the disowned transgressor even more strongly, often to destructive effect.

The sex scandals that have beset the Catholic church, since I left it, have revealed how outdated and flawed the fundamentalist Judeo-Christian moral code is with regard to sex; it simply does not work to blindly repress sexual energy, to cover it up, to pretend it's not there. Although there are many men who have consciously and successfully chosen to sublimate or transcend their sexuality into something more focussed, through religious vocation, all too many have chosen priesthood in a Canute-like attempt to stem the tide of their sexuality, and adopt a hypocritical role in public policy on matters sexual that perpetuates fear and ignorance, and encourages furtiveness and shame. One infamous example of this split occurred in a gay sex club in Dublin in the early nineties - a priest died of a heart attack there, and there happened to be two other priests present to give him the last rites. I offer this as a sad example of how, in my experience, the harsher the injunction to avoid sex, and in particular queer sex, the more it is likely to result in guilt-ridden 'acting out' against the strictures, in the same way as US Christian-funded abstinence programmes for young people have such a poor record in preventing teenage pregnancies.

This is not something that is just of significance in places like the
US, or Ireland, or in the developing world where aid workers are prevented by Catholic/Christian funders from teaching sexual health sensibly, resulting in people dying of AIDS. This Christian shame cycle - prohibition leading to transgression leading to low self-esteem and compulsive behaviour, fuelling an even more tyrannical prohibition - has found its way via the 12-step movement into addiction treatment models, and also to psychosynthesis, through writers such as John Firman and Anne Gila, in *The Primal Wound*. Happily, psychosynthesis is a broad church, and draws not only on early psychoanalytic principles but also on spiritual traditions from the East as well as the West, and there is room for many other perspectives than theirs.

A truly healthy psychotherapeutic approach encourages each person to be fully who they are, with less inner conflict, more energy to tackle life’s real challenges, less susceptibility to criticism and rejection, and a greater sense of inner conviction that one is turning out exactly as one is supposed to. Queer people in psychotherapy often challenge traditional notions of relationships, gender, and sexual expression, and in order to fully respect the mystery and wonder of human evolution we need to listen to each queer story with an ear for what is new, what is trying to emerge and break free from convention. The moment we attempt to impose, directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously, a model of relating or sexuality that is based on the monogamous heterosexual model, we have lost faith with our queer clients, we run the risk of driving them further into depression or self-alienation. Kenneth Lewes writes eloquently on this, challenging the bias in current psychoanalytic thinking towards the relational. Queer people look to us as therapists to honour their journey so far, not to dismiss it. The truly challenging notion, that real change can only begin with complete acceptance, implies that each queer person has to begin their healing journey by a detailed examination of their own lives and ascertain which aspects are natural forms of self-expression, and which are the result of pernicious cultural attitudes towards sex, gender difference, creativity, and the very notion of individuality itself. The happy ‘ending’ of a happy monogamous relationship is something that so many well-meaning people wish for me, and for other gay men like me - if only we’d ‘settle down’ with a nice man and stop this endless searching, this adventuring, this restlessness. This play. Being a single sexual man is not supposed to be satisfying or nourishing or the mark of healthy psychological development. I must, therefore, have not had the right therapy to see the error of my ways, am in complete
denial over my sex addiction, not overcome my resistance to intimacy, stubbornly remained attached to the faulty container of the sexualised, perverse sexual encounter, and obviously been unable to tolerate ambivalence in relationships and the lack of control.

Or is that just what being a man is like?

To look at the role of sex in the lives of many men, and our engagement with cruising, in a non-shaming, gentle, transpersonal light, is essential in order to work towards a lasting, workable, inner peace. By making the desire to commune conscious, by seeing sex as a creative form of self-expression, we can begin to enjoy ourselves in our transgression, and even begin to bring that puckish, transgressive queer spirit to bear in our public lives. It changes from being an experience that is driven and cold and shame-filled, often quite risky, to one that is less compulsive, more enjoyable, and friendlier. More responsible. And actually quite liberating. But it’s not easy. Making peace, whether intrapsychically or across tribal/nationalistic schisms, is a painful, often intractable business. Many mystical traditions speak of the essentially disturbing experience of contact with the transpersonal, an eruption of the sacred. We should not accept that because we find ourselves so disturbed that we are diseased, sinful, and defective. We are as God, or Shiva, or Darwin, or Freud, made us. Not quite monks of Dionysus. But differently blessed.

Further Reading


Moore, D. Diary of a Man Hot Press, 2005, Dublin

Dermod Moore
Dermod is a Dubliner. A former actor, he is a columnist, writer, astrologer, and psychosynthesis psychotherapist. Ever since he was seventeen, when he co-founded the first Irish gay youth group, he has been interested in the relationship between religion and sex.

www.dermod.moore.name
In October 2004, at a Pink Therapy conference called Queer Analysis, I offered a social dreaming matrix. This is an account of that event.

Preparation

The evening before, I gave a brief introduction. I explained that social dreaming was developed by Gordon Lawrence and others at the Tavistock Institute, in the 1980s. The origins of the concept are described by Lawrence in Social Dreaming @ Work. The main hypothesis is that dreams can have social, as well as personal, meanings, and can illuminate the connection between the two.

Social dreaming is a way of exploring this hypothesis experientially. We meet in what is called a matrix - to distinguish the gathering from other kinds of group. Participants have a specific task to share and associate to dreams, making connections where possible. There is no right or wrong interpretation. We accept that responses we make are our own. Common themes or patterns may emerge, but we don’t need to agree on them.

Having talked about the background, I outlined practical arrangements for the next day to ensure that participants knew what to expect. I also wanted to suggest that sharing dreams in a social setting can be common-place – as it is in many other cultures.

I ended my introduction by considering the relevance of social dreaming to our conference theme: the therapeutic concerns of sexual minorities. I suggested:

• Social dreaming enables us to share our dreams, while accepting that we may each respond differently. There’s a parallel
in the way we might wish to relate to each other, as members of a sexual minority. Social dreaming enables us to talk meaningfully about the nature of queer desire, while reminding us that the experience of desire is unique.

• The professional literature, our experience as therapists, and our personal histories, all bear witness to difficulties which we encounter, living in ways which don’t conform to heterosexual norms. Can a queer couple walk down the street, holding hands, in the same unthinking way a heterosexual couple might? It depends on the street. Perhaps members of any marginal group, whether identified sexually, racially, economically, or by faith, will always have to disguise their desires to some extent, and live in their dreams. All the more reason, therefore, for us to make a space in which we can share our dreams openly, and safely.

• Finally, there is the question of what we may dream of, not just in terms of our desire as individuals, but our desire for a queer culture to identify with. Jack Drescher, in Psychoanalytic Therapy and The Gay Man, quotes Robin Metcalfe:

‘The road that leads to a gay identity is often a slow and difficult one, but it is not for any lack of gay desire, or even necessarily of gay experience. It is because, growing up in this culture, we are not exposed to stories or images that reflect that experience; we have no words with which to name it. We must learn – or invent – a vocabulary with which to call our gay selves into being.’ (p.11)

This applies, of course, not just to gays, but to all sexual minorities. Social dreaming can provide us with shared imagery, shared vocabulary, shared stories, to help us meet the challenge we face, and which our clients face in Queer Analysis – that of calling our queer selves and our queer culture into being, in ways we have still to imagine.

Incubation

‘Hope you sleep well tonight,’ laughed one of the organisers, as I left the conference venue. ‘It would be awful if you found you couldn’t sleep at all.’

I woke around 2.30. I was restless, troubled by thoughts and images I couldn’t quite apprehend. The playful suggestion that I might find I couldn’t sleep felt like a curse.

I guessed my anxiety related partly to the conference, and what it had meant for me the previous evening, to make a public presentation at a sexual
minority event. It also related to the matrix I was due to hold in a few hours.

Around 5.30, images crystallised – dream-like, though I was not asleep. I saw myself participating in a parachute drop of soldiers during World War II. The aim of the operation was to capture a bridge, like Arnhem – ‘a bridge too far’. My parachute got caught in a tree. I dangled there helplessly, while others fell to the ground. I wondered whether I would be left for the Nazis to find. They would use me for target practice. Or would my mate try to rescue me, at danger to himself? Would he climb the tree, and cut me down? Could I avoid injury in the fall?

Disturbing though these images were, they gave me something to relate to. There were associations I could make, with my experience of the previous evening, and the matrix to come. A thought emerged: holding the matrix, I must not feel suspended above it. I would be on the level with other participants. I also knew I would not be alone. My friend and colleague, Laurence Roberts, was holding the matrix with me. He would be my mate.

I began to feel better, conscious that engaging meaningfully with the disparate thoughts and sensations which had previously troubled me is the essence of dream-work. I felt in touch with my dream-life, and ready for the matrix.

Back at the venue, I was alone for a moment with Laurence. ‘I need to know you’re there’, I said. ‘I’m here’, he said, and gave me a hug. I felt earthed at last.

**Matrix**

Around twenty people joined. Laurence was time-keeper. We had fifty minutes.

With the agreement of participants, I made notes. What follows reflects the life and language of the matrix. Allowance must be made for the selective line I have taken, grossly simplifying rich material, and my need to paraphrase.

The first dream is prefaced by a request:

1. ‘I have a dream, please... Someone dead in a group. Someone said, ‘Exchange the body for the dead queen’...’

Three more follow, in quick succession, as if there is a sudden release of energy. The last of these:

4. ‘My dream was about a gentle man – in a white robe... He’s holding a hollowed candle – like a church candle. I think it’s connected with anal penetration. I think, ‘It wont fit’... The dream shifts, to me in bed with my husband. We’re contemplating intercourse.... We’re too tired. Our sex-life is dormant. I think of a dormouse... Conservation... Conversation... Yesterday, during drinks, I was asked,
am I homosexual. I went blank. Where do I fit?’

Among the associations which follow:

‘The dormouse. Alice in Wonderland – the Mad Hatter’s Tea-Party. These dreams are about ritual… we have a task, a sacred task.’

This prompts my first intervention:

LS (1): ‘I’m wondering whether the task of the matrix, sharing and associating to dreams, feels like a sacred task, or a Mad Hatter’s Tea-Party.’

A complex narrative follows:

‘5. I had several dreams – they felt sacred, profane, mad…’

It culminates in a compelling image:

‘There was a man I was attracted to, standing in a stream. Behind him I saw a crocodile. I watched the crocodile drag him under, and swim away.’

Others provide associations, expressing doubts and anxieties, then the dreamer adds:

‘The young male in the river is standing against the flow. I hoped my dream would overcome the sense of risk…’

I make a second intervention:

LS (2): ‘I wonder whether there is some concern – can a dream survive in the matrix?’

This prompts the comment:

‘I can’t escape the idea – we’re in a ritual space for me. Gay people traditionally play a role as shaman, mediating between one world and another… Wrestling with death, impermanence, constantly consumes me. In the dream...”
about the youth – is the crocodile death? Part of me feels youthful, the other a wise old man…’

Two more dreams (Nos. 6 and 7). Further associations. Then the following exchange:

‘I’m not sure whether coming here is comforting or dangerous. The word queer is on the map again. When I was young, it was a term of opprobrium. I don’t like gay/lesbian – queer opens things out. But it exposes me – do I have to take a position or not…’

‘Years ago, I would have reacted strongly to the word.’

‘Which word?’

‘Queer. Like fairy. I have strong feelings about these words. Being an outsider is a universal condition. A lot of life involves putting labels on. Perhaps we should put them on. Do we accept being different? Perhaps the shaman is different.’

I make a third intervention:

LS (3): ‘I’m thinking about our dreams as the shaman, connecting worlds.’

Further exchanges begin:

‘You have to go down in the dark – that’s how fairy stories start...’

Two more dreams, (Nos. 8 and 9), of which the second relates back to dream No. 4:

9. ‘This dream isn’t a story – flashes of imagery. There’s a lot of talk about angels these days – it feels weak, new age. My images were of angels... sexless. I’m thinking, ‘I’d love to share them, but I’m damned if I’ll tell them I saw angels.’’

This prompts the comment:

‘I’m resisting this merging of the sexual and the spiritual – God and anal penetration...’

Then comes a remarkable exchange, in which dreams and associations, what is imagined and what is experienced, the metaphorical and the literal, interweave.

10. ‘I had a dream about working as a liaison person, between two organisations. I had to arrange something, at the Angel end of City Road...’

‘Angels as messengers. Anyone, at any time, can have a message and be an angel. Perhaps psychotherapists are angels.’

‘They also have to make a living – the Angel end of City Road.’

‘I’m thinking of the matrix as a place of safety, belonging... The gay community is ideally placed to give a sense of belonging, but sometimes it’s the opposite.’

‘I didn’t think I would be saying anything. I had a long journey here today. I was
unfamiliar with the train stops. I got off at Angel, instead of Kings Cross. Had to wait three minutes for a train. I felt I needed those three minutes on Angel platform. I wondered if it was resistance about coming. Now it seems to have another dimension.’

‘Jung would call it synchronicity – the collective links we have, which we don’t know about...’

Another dream (No.11) reflects the dichotomy between the spiritual and the sensual. The associations continue:

‘Years ago, at the Angel end of City Road, there was a well known cottage, a particular focus of police action against gay men. I don’t know if it’s still there...

Decomposition. The crocodile takes the body of its prey under water and waits until it decomposes...’

‘Death, decomposition, digestion – that’s brought me back into this room. The bodies here – creative potential. The sense of loss, when I gave up on the idea of being procreative. What happens when people come together – they fertilise across boundaries. The child I hope for and grieve for.’

‘Matrix as womb – you said it means womb. Groups as a womb...’

We return to the crocodile:

‘I wasn’t scared. I watched freely, as the crocodile sank the man. Perhaps it was more like incubation.’

‘There’s been a lot in the news about children in incubators – should they live or die?’

‘There’s an incubator here – the child of this group. The sense of queer as cross-sex and cross-gender. We’re producing massive evidence that we’re more connected than we think.’

‘I agree with the sense of connections. It’s impressive. Maybe we minimize the differences. Some of the images are violent. What if the differences are allowed to emerge?’

‘Your concern about queer. Yours about acceptance in the gay community. Yours about procreation. These feel like barbs coming at me. I came out when I was 17 or 18. I was never entirely happy in the gay community. I got married. After 10 years, I got divorced. Now I have a same-sex partner. My son lives with us. I’ve always felt very queer. It’s taken time for me to celebrate it. I am queer, thank you very much. With a lot of time and thought, I got there. All these dream thoughts are penetrating.’

I intervene again:

...
LS (4): ‘How it is, to feel penetrated by dreams.’

Which gets the response:

‘An internal experience in me. Changes – thoughts decompose – new experiences.’

The message seems to be: allowing dreams to penetrate and affect us, individually or culturally, may be disturbing - but if we can let it happen, we may experience a transformation in our thinking.

A final thought:

‘I’m worried about the emphasis on synchronicity. Are we losing the sense of difference when we push to synchronicity?’

At this point, Laurence closes the matrix. He has made no other interventions – a personal choice.

We have ten minutes for reflection. A theoretical argument begins, about the nature of synchronicity and the use of the term queer. I suggest that the abstract quality of this dialogue is a response to closure of the matrix. There’s a shift. The remaining time is mainly filled with personal observations. Participants feel exhausted, depressed, celebratory:

‘It’s been so short and so profound…’

‘The whole has been more than the parts…’

‘I’m part of something bigger than me. It’s comforting.’

A participant sums up:

‘Social dreaming seems to be a comment on society – the emphasis on connectedness. We carry the disconnectedness of society.’

The session ends. Time to reconnect with the rest of the conference.

Themes

Various themes emerged for me, from the matrix:

• **Sharing dreams.** Initial anxiety is expressed in images of exposure, ritual, death, and madness. This is not just a response to the novelty of the matrix. As I was reminded the previous night, anxiety is around when any creative process gets underway. The anxiety abates. There’s a sense of excitement, discovery, birth. By the time we reach the post-matrix reflection, it’s as if we have participated in an intense and demanding communal event, with considerable personal satisfaction.

• **Angels and crocodiles.** We move through a spectrum of images, from angels to crocodiles, from heights to depths. The image of the shaman as mediator provides a reference point. Our journey is reminiscent of
shamanic ‘soul flight’ (Winkelman – Shamanism, pp. 60-3).

The liaison person in dream No.10 - another mediator – lands us at the Angel end of City Road. Associations to this dream provide an expanding perspective of self and sexuality, in relation to the spiritual and the instinctual, the exotic and the mundane – as if transcendent, surface and underground networks are intersecting.

The reference to a public toilet (cottage) near the Angel – the goings-on there once a target for police action - anticipates a point made later in the conference. Andrew Samuels was talking about ‘hot prejudices’ we currently have to contend with (Queer Therapy – A New Standard of Excellence). He urged us to challenge heterosexist assumptions that promiscuous sex in public toilets defines what being gay is about.

In the matrix, it’s not clear whether this particular toilet is still there. It might be history. A link is made, between the participant underground, waiting on the Angel platform, and the attractive young man dragged underwater, in the crocodile dream (No. 5) - an image of incubation. Submersion and disintegration become a prelude to re-integration and emergence – enabling us to surface, perhaps, in a different place, in relation to our conflicts at ground level.

- **Intimacy.** I was touched by the surprise and delight of participants, when they found that making associative links in the matrix facilitated a sense of inter-personal connection, meeting a deeply felt need for this. At the same time, there were anxieties that greater intimacy, or fantasies of it, might involve denial or loss of difference.

- **Queer.** Despite its historic connotations as a term of abuse, the term queer acquired particular value in the matrix. There was a sense that terms such as gay, lesbian and transgender can be restrictive labels, which we need to move beyond if we are to experience more fully the uniqueness of our sexuality, and the relationships through which we express it.

**A bridge too far?**

The anthropologist Ken Burridge observed:

‘There is no culture from whose activities and categories of understanding it is not possible to infer an instruction to break free of moral constraints and soar, like a hawk, beyond and above the laocoon coils of given social relations.’(Encountering Aborigines, p.159)

Our experience in the matrix reflects an imperative of this
nature – an anarchic imperative, which we might call *queer*.

In a culture where ‘given social relations’ involve the domination of heterosexual norms, those of us who identify with - or sympathise with – a sexual minority may seek to affirm the positive value of such an identification. *Queer* is the rallying cry of such a movement. But in the environment of a conference like *Queer Analysis*, an identification of this kind itself becomes the ‘given’. The same may apply in the containing space of psychotherapy.

Then the dreams and associations of the matrix show that we may still aspire to go further, to break free of constraints which such identifications place upon us – to soar above, like hawks or angels, and to plumb the depths, like the crocodile. *Queer* transcends and subverts conventional distinctions, celebrating our singularity in relation to the objects of our desire - our fears and longings for intimate connection. It also ceases to be an exclusive preserve of sexual minorities.

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**Further Reading**


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Resources for Therapists working with Sexual Minority Clients

Organisations:
Lesbian Information Service – lots of articles and research on issues related to lesbian (& gay) mental health issues
www.lesbianinformationservice.org
Pink Therapy – the UK’s largest specialist independent therapy service working with sexual and gender minority clients. Offers training workshops and website hosts online Directory of Pink Therapists – 200+ therapists around the UK working in a sexuality affirmative way.
www.pinktherapy.com
Queery.Org A national online directory of LGBT information and advice. www.queery.org.uk
Regard – national organisation of disabled LGBT people. Has a befriending and pen pal scheme, newsletter etc.
www.regard.dircon.co.uk
Pink Parents – support and social activities for LGBT families. www.pinkparents.org.uk
Friends and Families of Lesbians and Gays FFLAG – supports parents and family members of LGBT people with 40 helplines throughout the UK, groups and other resources
www.fflag.org.uk

Recommended Reading for Therapists:
Davies, D and Neal, C. (eds.) (1996-2000) Pink Therapy 3 volumes of sexual minority therapy textbooks for counsellors. Published by Open University Press

Getting Ready - An Interactive Workbook for Gay/Bi Men on Self-Esteem and Getting into Relationships
Getting Ready is an interactive workbook for gay and bisexual men which focuses on increasing self-esteem and getting ready for relationships. It was written by Tim Foskett from PACE (The Project for Advocacy, Counselling and Education), an LGBT voluntary organisation specialising in mental health and emotional well-being, and produced by the Camden & Islington Gay Men’s Team in London.
The workbook is based on two of PACE’s most popular workshops for gay/bi men, Friend or Foe (on self-esteem) and Looking for Mr Right (on getting into relationships). It brings together a host of exercises, ideas and suggestions to help men boost their self-acceptance and think creatively about how to go about seeking a boyfriend.
Employing a friendly and relaxed style, the workbook uses cartoons and illustrations by David Shenton as well as a range of light-hearted and more serious activities to enable the reader to work at a level that is right for them.
While the workbook is aimed at gay/bi men it may also be of use to others who are working on these issues.

For free copies of the workbook please contact Richard Cox at the Camden & Islington Gay Men’s Team on 020 7530 3596 or email: richard.cox@camdenpct.nhs.uk
For more information about PACE workshops please ring 020 7700 1323 or email info@pace.dircon.co.uk
There have been many books written by and about survivors of child sexual abuse, which centre on the healing and recovery of survivors. This book breaks new ground in that it focuses entirely on the experiences of lesbian survivors, and as such it offers a significant, innovative and original contribution to the current literature of child sexual abuse. Through the stories and words of sixty women who have contributed to her book, Rafanello has written extensively about the impact of child sexual abuse on every area of our lives as lesbian women. I was particularly struck by the comprehensiveness of her research; not only has she chosen to concentrate on areas habitually neglected, but she brings a particularly lesbian vision and illumination to these themes. I found this to be both exciting and inspiring.

Rafanello describes the parallel issues pertaining to childhood sexual abuse and to homophobia, and the double stigma confronting lesbians who are survivors. She tackles the contentious cause and effect question of child sexual abuse and sexual orientation and, quoting extensively from research into the subject and from survivors, effectively dismisses it, concluding that ‘any attempt to find a cause for lesbianism is homophobic’, and as such undermining. Much of her research with survivors revealed that questioning their sexuality was part of women’s internalised homophobia.

Rafanello quotes from researchers who describe the parallel experiences of being lesbian and a survivor of child sexual abuse; the sense of being doubly oppressed or victimised; the possible need to deal, once again, with secrecy, isolation, grief, shame and a sense of having been wronged, abandoned or scorned by society. Lesbians, like abused children, both face the challenge of disclosure and its repercussions; chaos, conflict, anxiety and blame. In some cases the need to protect family members from shame and pain is likely to lead to a distancing of themselves in order to do this.

Because this book is for lesbian survivors, I found the specifically lesbian focus on sex and relationships following childhood sexual
abuse to be both liberating and healing - for once our relationships are the central theme and not an addendum. In talking about lesbian survivors and relationships, Rafanello states, ‘given that almost 40% of lesbians are incest survivors, at some point in her life almost every lesbian will be affected by childhood sexual abuse. If they weren’t abused themselves, they’re very likely to find themselves in a relationship with a woman who was’. She quotes research citing that 38% of women may be survivors, and 38% of lesbian women may be survivors. She explores the issues faced by lesbian survivors where in some couples both partners may feel that the abuse issue is a permanent presence. This creates the dilemma within their sexual intimacy of recreating the abusive situation. She cites research findings proposing that abuse history among lesbians results in issues of negotiated sex and concomitant lack of spontaneity. In a more positive light, however, she also suggests that the emotional bond and understanding of the female experience can create a higher level of acceptance of the partner who is a survivor of child sexual abuse than is possible in heterosexual relationships, and many women interviewed describe their great affinity with other women whose friendship and love made healing possible.

Rafanello suggests that the depth of this bond may also be crucial to the partner’s involvement and acceptance of contact with the abusive family. In writing about the challenges facing survivors who choose to continue to relate to their family of origin when the abuse occurred within it, she again brings a particularly lesbian vision to the dilemma, maintaining that ‘lesbians’ relationships with their mothers are particularly complex’, due to the difficulty of coming out and being accepted. This fact, in addition to a relationship possibly already strained due to divulging sexual abuse, can feel insurmountable.

This book contains much useful information about aspects of healing and recovery; in a chapter about healing, Rafanello summarises cognitive techniques that can help with internalised shame and guilt, and describes how therapy can be useful in the healing process. She quotes research outlining how abuse may have interrupted women’s emotional and psychological development and includes research which illustrates the recovery process. She includes current research and information about post traumatic stress disorder and various treatments. Healing therapies and resources specifically for lesbians are included, although her research and subjects are American and therefore are not wholly relevant to a British experience.

I found this book to be written in an accessible and engaging style. Sections on theory and ideas are interspersed with women’s stories and quotes and the combination of the ‘academic’ and the personal works well. Rafanello considers every area of lesbian life; from coming out to relating to families of origin; from sex and intimacy to lesbian parenting; from alcohol and drug misuse to eating disorders; and explores the myriad ways in which a herstory of child sexual
abuse may have impacted on the women she interviewed. It is a unique and distinctive book, which will provide a valuable resource for lesbian survivors, the women who love them, and for counsellors and therapists.

**Further Resources:**
The following resources may be useful for women needing help or support in the UK.
One in Four – a national charity offering one to one counseling and group support, where all the workers are survivors. This organization is for men and women.
0208 697 2112
The DABS Directory – Directory and Book Services contains listings of all current resources for sexual abuse.
01709 860023
The Survivors Trust is a national umbrella organization for all specialist services around sexual abuse.
01788 551150

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**The Complete Gay and Lesbian Parenting Guide**

Arlene Istar Lev
Berkley 2004. 364 pages

**For Lesbian Parents**

Suzanne M Johnson & Elizabeth O’Connor
Guilford Press 2001. 242 pages

The irony of agreeing to review two parenting books is that between sharing care for my two-year-old son and a busy therapy practice, I don’t have time to read whole books. But I’m glad I read both of these, especially the Johnson and O’Connor. I read them both cover to cover and for gay parents and therapists, their benefits are, like all good parenting books, as reference texts to consult for ideas about a parenting issue.

Both books draw on real parenting experience with studies and examples gleaned from a specific research study in the case of Johnson and O’Connor and through client information and internet networks in the case of Istar Lev.

Both also cover basically the same territory including descriptions of different types of family, how lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)
families are created and the questions raised by various routes like insemination with known or unknown donors, concerns for biological and non biological mothers and the range of adoption issues, the different stages of family life and problems that might arise along the way through to race and culture (particularly in relation to trans-cultural adoption), legal information, family break up and the creation of new step family structures.

One word of caution though is that both books are American, so some of the legal facts are different and the assumption of the normality of trans-cultural adoption and surrogacy are very different from the UK where we may have more reservations about the rightness of using these routes to create a family.

Surprisingly the supposed audience for both books was largely, though not wholly, irrelevant. Istar Lev addresses some additional issues for bisexual and transgender parents, however she also appears to me to address co-parenting between gay men and lesbians more from the lesbian point of view and, from my experience, there are a lot of concerns specific to gay men as parents that deserve more space and thought. The Johnson and O'Connor also has relevance for all LGBT parents irrespective of gender because of the topics which it addresses rather than its audience and I wouldn't dismiss it because you aren't a lesbian or working with a lesbian parent. The key differences are those of tone and emphasis – the Istar Lev is primarily for parents about parenting i.e. the first third of the book is about how to get pregnant or adopt. She also comes from a more ‘queer politics’ perspective, and whilst I own up to being tired when I started reading it, I found it slightly bossy and politically patronising and probably wouldn’t have got past the introduction if I hadn’t had to read it. For example, Istar Lev tells us to be proud of our alternative family structures whilst Johnson and O’Connor focus on how to help our children to negotiate their feelings about their families including, hopefully, feeling proud.

However I’m glad I did read the Istar Lev as the book contains many useful reflections. In particular, as a therapist I enjoyed a chapter on traditional family life cycle models (e.g. Carter & McGoldrick, 1999) and gay coming out models (Cass, 1979) and their relevance and applicability for LGBT families. She discusses the critiques of traditional family life cycle models as not allowing for gay families, but also rightly points out that existing models of gay transition assume that the individual is single and without dependents. Family systems theories teach us that families struggle most when moving from one developmental stage to another and for LGBT people, these developmental stages are potentially more problematic. This chapter gives some useful indications of what to look out for both for us as parents and as therapists.

Johnson and O’Connor are, by contrast, both developmental psychologists and their book is largely child centred with the focus less on what issues will
arise for us as parents, but on how to approach the particular issues that we face as gay families in a way which will enable our children to grow up happy, healthy and proud. As such, I felt deeply affirmed and stimulated by the way this book spoke to me as a lesbian parent about my family and the needs of my child.

They start with the very clear message that it is almost impossible to remain in the closet if you have children and they therefore address as a priority how to discuss the nature of your family with your children and how to help them to negotiate the external world and talk about their alternative family structure. Later in the book this emphasis leads to a useful discussion of homophobia and discrimination which points out that your child’s first response to learning that their parents may be subject to prejudice will probably be concern for your safety and they gently suggest not to give a political lecture but to reassure the child that you will take every precaution to stay safe. The chapter then goes on to discuss helping them to deal with the discrimination they face and how to bringing up your child to be open and celebrate diversity.

Another section looks at the development of gender identity and addresses the concerns of some lesbian and gay parents that their children might be ‘missing out’ on gender role models and what impact this might have. At the same time they recognize that many lesbian parents might not wish their children to grow up conforming to traditional gender stereotypes. Each chapter ends with a useful ‘What You Can Do’ section with bullet points for busy, stressed parents on what you can do to encourage good self esteem in your children in relation to the issues they are discussing.

As a lesbian parent, it’s easy to get caught up only reading straight parenting books once you’ve achieved the miracle of actually becoming a family. The wonder of watching your child develop seems such a universal act, that apart from the relief of meeting up with other gay parents, I often forget what is unique and genuinely different about parenting in a lesbian family.

These books refocused me on my gay perspective, validated the parenting issues which I’m already facing and identified others to prepare for. Both books, but particularly the Johnson-O’Connor one, also gave me ideas and analysis of the applicability of mainstream parenting theories with which to feed my need to think about my parenting as well as doing it. So if you are a lesbian, gay or transgender parent or a therapist working with gay families my recommendation would be to buy them both and to keep them close to you on your bookshelf or bedside table, alongside your other parenting books to refer to on a regular basis for advice, recognition and inspiration.

Roz Pendlebury is a humanistic psychotherapist, couples therapist and work coach who specialises in working with lesbian and gay individuals and couples. She lives in London with her long-term lesbian partner and their young son.

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Looking wider as well as forward

A few days ago we had a Board Meeting and began to discuss the Editorial Policy of Self & Society, and where AHP should be going. These topics were raised nearly two years ago in S&S after changing our strapline to ‘A Forum for Contemporary Psychology’. There was limited debate from you our members, and since then your Board has mainly been concerned with putting our house in better order, letting in more light and raising our energy, a metaphor that emerged from last year’s AGM. We’re now restarting to address these wider issues, while still devoting a lot of effort to improving our systems. Early next year we plan to have a Readership Survey, to find out what you want, and don’t want, from S&S, and use that as a guide to widening the role of AHP. We’d like to do far more than we do, organise Workshops, Conferences and such to spread the ideals and ideas of humanistic psychology. But we’ve too few people and too tight a budget to attempt much of that – yet. Financially we need more members; numbers are increasing, though very slowly. We need your help to publicise S&S, and your help to broaden our activities. So I’m very pleased that our ‘How you can help’ notice in the previous S&S produced some volunteers to act as regional links and to distribute flyers. We need more, so do contact us. Please look at this issue’s ‘How you can help’ notice on page 55 where we’re now looking for help from tutors and course directors.

One of the wider activities we considered was to join forces with AHPP, the humanistic psychology practitioners, in a joint weekend conference. That was too ambitious for both of us, but AHPP are celebrating their 25th year on 26th November, to which all members of AHP are invited, see the advert in this issue, and if going let AHPP know asap. John Rowan will be there launching the new edition of his book ‘A Guide to Humanistic Psychology’. Let us build up energy, people and funds to grandly celebrate our 35th year, in 2007. As most members know, until 2000 AHPP was a sub-section of AHP(B); but differing administrative and financial needs led to an amicable separation. At the time some saw it as the kids leaving home (they’d been with us for 20 years!); others felt we were older and younger siblings going our different ways. Nevertheless, we are all part of the wider humanistic community, and not just teachers, facilitators, therapists, clinicians, or whatever we practice. We’re human, humane, and trying to be humanistic in a largely non-humanistic world. We’ll have S&S on display at AHPP’s celebration, come and make yourself known to me and other members of the committee.
My mother died last week. It wasn’t unexpected, but it was still a shock to get the phone call from the hospital. My initial reaction was one of relief, tinged with guilt – guilt because I sensed it was relief for me as much as for her. She no longer has to suffer, and nor do I. The last few weeks had been difficult.

I did have some truly wonderful experiences just sitting with her, allowing myself to ‘dream into’ her space, and us together going on a journey in which she seemed to experience the joy and wonder of being a child again, an aspect of her I had never seen before.

Arranging the funeral was quite a challenge because the Registrar of Births and Deaths considered the reason for death on the certificate from the hospital to be unclear. She contacted the coroner who insisted there must be a post-mortem. I was furious, feeling this was an unnecessary violation of my mother’s body. She had been in hospital for a month and nearly died two or three times. It was clear to me it was a communication problem. The Registrar said this was the ‘post Shipman’ era, sympathised but said she was helpless to do anything. Could I speak to the Coroner’s officer? No, but he would phone me the next day. In the meantime the coroner advised the funeral director that the funeral should be delayed. Plans for the funeral were in place, two sets of relatives had booked their flight to the UK. I kept phoning but he was out of the office. It was 2pm on Friday afternoon, I gave up and began the long drive away - resigned to a post-mortem and delayed funeral. As I rehearsed away in my imagination the story I would tell when I met up with my partner I realised I was putting myself in the role of the victim in this tragedy. I thought, ‘Do I have any choice here? ’ and decided to make one last phone call to the Coroner’s officer. Amazingly he answered the phone himself and I realised this was my one chance. I summoned up all my communication and negotiating skills.

It became clear that the problem was the order in which the conditions causing death had been written. The Coroner’s officer came round to my point of view and agreed to phone the hospital. He reckoned if the doctor would agree to reword the death certificate he could then get the coroner to agree to it. He would phone me back. I sat waiting in my car for a tense fifteen minutes. He phoned to say the doctor was rewriting the certificate but I needed to get to the Relatives Office at the hospital by 3pm when it closed for the weekend. I got there at five to three, and ten minutes later on to the Registry office in the next town before it closed. By 4pm I was on my way to Suffolk and my world had turned round in two hours. The funeral was a beautiful service, my mother honoured and an era completed.
In despair at our violent, polarised world this summer, and at the earth’s seeming traumatic response, I imagined the current conflict as part of a drama going back to 1492, or even to the Romans: the battle between white man’s progress and the indigenous land-based way of life. So I took up the *Hopi Survival Kit*, which records the traditions, thoughts and feelings of Dan Evehema, a Hopi centenarian, interpreted by a Lutheran pastor with a passion to communicate and a surprising name, Thomas E. Mails. Let’s do this bit fast. Mails is an awful writer; his book is a muddle. But it is an astonishing record; it is cardiac inspiration.

The Hopi belong to the ‘pueblo’ group of Amerindians, farmers who build permanent villages on top of high mesas in Arizona and New Mexico. It was here, when he visited in the twenties, that Jung first began to reflect on the white man’s catastrophic psychic legacy. “We think they [whites] are mad, [because] they say they think with their heads” – rather than their hearts - he heard from one of the few willing to talk, (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections* pp. 246). Astonishingly, these people cling to an existence and a metaphysics that can hardly be different from that of our pre-historical ancestors, whose earth religion no one understands. Their attitude is one of universal reverence, and they propose, rather like the Cogi of Columbia (the only Native Americans not conquered by the Spanish), that the earth is in danger and that their simple way of life and thanksgiving prayers are vital to planetary health.

For the last 150 years, the US government has sold the Hopi down the river. In 1906, says Mallis, children were removed from their families and put into boarding schools to unlearn their language and traditions – a common white man’s trick to cheat his subjects of their emotional and spiritual birthright in exchange for the life of the mind. In vain protest, their chief, Yukiuma, was repeatedly jailed over 20 years. In 1997 I visited the Hopi reservation, and felt immediately at home – it was like being in Asia. But it was shocking to see how the Hopi were ignored and mistreated by authorities, how their ancient enemy, the pastoral Navaho, surround them on marginal land, and how in despair many turn to beer, smuggled in at exorbitant prices.

The message of the *Survival Kit* is simple – and it is one that Hopi chiefs have even tried to deliver to the UN. The role of mankind they call *Techqua Ikachi*, meaning ‘Blend with the land and celebrate life.’ Their prophecies foretell a time of mounting natural catastrophe and global war. The remedy is to return to a life organised around cultivation, purification and thanks. If this is too onerous for the whole community then the Hopis should be freed from modern ‘conveniences’ and allowed to do this on behalf of us all.

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11am AHPP AGM
1pm Lunch
HUMANISTIC PRACTICE - Then and Now
2pm A panel with an 'open chair'
A plenary group to review the present state of Humanistic Practice in the light of recent developments.
5pm A champagne celebration of 25 years of AHPP.

Members of AHP(B) are warmly invited to attend and contribute.
Please phone or email Ian Doucet if you plan to come for lunch and / or the celebration:
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Admission is free. The cost of lunch will be £5 per person.

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