

Short training review: Working with dissociation from a relational perspective. Organised by CAPP (Centre for Attachment based Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy) and the Clinic for Dissociative Studies

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And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

Anais Nin

Having attended the 10-week short course on working relationally with dissociation, I wish to write about the course, in the hope that more psychotherapists will recognise the importance of dissociation in the clinical practice and be encouraged to include such training in their personal and professional development.

Over the past eleven weeks (10 sessions with a week break in the middle), our small group (12 participants) buckled up and joined a rollercoaster of information, challenges, engagement and stormy counter-transferential experiences.

We all dissociate. The capacity to separate oneself from a certain aspect of our experience can be an invaluable defence against pain, be it physical, sexual or emotional. At its extreme, however, Dissociative disorders (and in particular Dissociative-Identity-Disorder, D.I.D) present us practitioners with highly complex and disturbing clinical picture of trauma, suffering and splits, as well as with the most creative survival and adaptive choices. Extreme defence mechanisms which may resemble schizophrenia at times, personality disorders at other times and an array of complaints, symptoms and somatisations at yet others make therapeutic relationship challenging at best of times. The course, enriching us with a variety of top-of-the-notch presenters (including Valerie Sinason, Rémy Aquarone, Adah Sachs and more) offered a possible way in. Attachment perspectives correlate these painful presentations with disorganised attachment, hence supplying us clinicians with some hope, and scope of working safely with severe dissociation. Learning to recognise dissociation, networking around it and creatively relating to our clients at such times was clearly demonstrated.

During the course, we were safely held by the ongoing presence of Emerald Davis (vice-chair of CAPP) as the other facilitators presented cases that made our stomachs churn. Working at the cutting edge of what relational psychotherapy is willing to open to, I felt humbled by the courage, creativity and fierce commitment to be at service the lecturers have displayed. Moreover, Dissociative-disorders, almost exclusively result from severe trauma, force clinician into taking a firm political stance. The illusion that psychotherapy takes place 'outside of the world' in our safe and neat rooms is harshly broken. It is that very dance between intrapsychic, interpersonal and societal/political that made this course so intriguing and enriching. And for such a short course, the group dynamic created between its members was extraordinary.

But more than all that, the presenters have all inspired us to remember, with passion, the importance of the practice of love. Notwithstanding the crucial place for shadow-work, for negative countertransference and challenge, it was the feeling that we were facing a genuine troop of 'soldiers of love' that helped me connect with my core values: this is what I am about, that's why I am doing psychotherapy.

The study of dissociation is not yet a necessary part of every psychotherapy training. This was only the second time this course had run. Both my professional 'ancestral' pillars – of body-psychotherapy and hypnotherapy have dedicated much attention to the splits that constitute safety, creativity and extreme pathology in our lives. What CAPP and CDS offer here will be, I believe, an integral element of psychotherapeutic training but the fact it is not yet so is a rare opportunity to engage in a revolutionary field. The study of dissociation, and relationally working with such presentations, bring together the depth of analytical thinking with humanistic relational perspectives and body-mind understandings.

I cannot recommend this course more strongly

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