

Limbus Lectures 2018

Guy Millon

Feb 3, 2018

Trembling with the Other:

How a mindfulness practice can support, stunt and subvert empathy

Abstract

Within psychoanalysis, empathy has been constructed in very different ways since Freud's use of the word *Einfühlung* to indicate the therapeutic stance necessary for coming into relationship with another mind. The British object-relations school conceptualised empathy as a form of projective identification, while Kohut, father of the American school of self psychology, theorised narcissism in terms of early experiences of empathic failure. However, for Lacan, empathy was a vicious "connivance" that threatened to sabotage the analysis. More recently, Buddhist teachings and practices introduced to the West have developed into the movement of mindfulness that has increasingly been integrated into psychological therapy - and this may be informing how therapists experience and make sense of empathy.

In this talk I will present my research which explores how mindfulness practitioners construct the process of empathy within the therapeutic relationship, analysing interview data with reference to psychoanalytic theory. I link empathy to constructs such as idealisation, narcissism, and lack to show how empathy can be used defensively to shore up a sense of self as independent and good, and yet how empathy can also comprise an encounter with something radically other. I hope that this exploration will create new opportunities to make sense of empathy and in doing so challenge the dominant discourses around what it means to empathise.

Dr Guy Millon is a counselling psychologist and is currently in training as a psychoanalyst with the Site for Contemporary Psychoanalysis. A major interest of his is insight meditation from the Buddhist tradition. His research brings theory from psychoanalysis into the field of meditation, and looks at how meditation practices can inform the psychoanalytic clinic.

At present he works within an NHS gender identity clinic. He has written on the importance of making psychoanalysis more relevant to the trans person and advances an approach that refutes pathologising or normative ends.

He also works in private practice in Exeter.

Sue Gerhardt

June 9, 2018

"A Fair Chance in Life"

Abstract

"I want Britain to be the world's great meritocracy - a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will allow."

These words of Theresa May sound hollow after the Grenfell fire which exposed the gaping class inequalities that still exist in our society. But still, the ideal of an individualistic, meritocratic nation is rarely questioned. This talk brings a developmental perspective to challenge the idea that every child can find his or her own place in society through hard work.

I will describe recent research in neuroscience, biology and psychology and what it tells us about human development as a dynamic, interactive process of system building within brain and body. What does this mean when you are born disadvantaged? How can individual children find their place in a society which does not start with a level playing field? What is the way out of poverty?

Whilst modern developmental knowledge has changed psychotherapy in many ways, particularly our understanding of early attachment and trauma, I hope this talk might stimulate those of us in the helping professions to consider how we could use our experience and understanding to feed into a wider public conversation about the kind of society we want to create.

Sue Gerhardt has been a practising psychoanalytic psychotherapist for 20 years, working in private practice in Oxford. In 1998, she co-founded a charity, the Oxford Parent Infant Project, and worked for 12 years with a wide range of parents and babies as a parent infant psychotherapist. She is the author of two books- the best-selling *Why Love Matters: how affection shapes a baby's brain* (2014) and *The Selfish Society* (2010) and is currently working on a book about health.

Rex Haigh
Sept 15, 2018

Therapeutic Communities: The Radical Edge

Abstract:

In the 1300s, the village of Geel in Flanders used to welcome 'mentally afflicted pilgrims' and supported them to work on the land, saving them from early death as outcasts from society; in the 1790s, William Tuke founded The Retreat in York and started the 'Moral Treatment' movement, in which people with mental illness were no longer chained up and kept as animals. In the Second World War, the group therapy experiments with battle-shocked soldiers brought the name 'therapeutic communities' into psychiatric practice. All these endeavours challenged the established exercise of power and the traditional nature of relationships.

This paper will explain what therapeutic communities are standing up for and challenging in contemporary times: why they are still at the radical edge of psychiatry and mental health services - and need to be. It will cover themes including the politics of data and evidence; biomedical and pharmaceutical dominance; fluid hierarchies; immersive training experiences; how patient safety can become a health hazard; taking control of quality; and toxic environments.

Rex Haigh studied social sciences as well as medicine as an undergraduate, being particularly interested in critical theories of psychiatry. After working as a GP, he trained as psychiatrist, then as an NHS medical psychotherapist and group analyst - and became a consultant in Berkshire in 1994, where he has been based since. He received a mid-career award from the Health Foundation in 2002, and became Clinical Advisor to the English Personality Disorder Development Programme until it closed in 2011. At the Royal College of Psychiatrists, he was the founder of 'Community of Communities' quality network in 2002 and the 'Enabling Environments' award in 2008. He was on the NICE guideline development group for Borderline Personality Disorder, and is involved with several third sector organisations in the Personality Disorder field. His particular clinical interests are modified therapeutic communities, ecotherapy, critical psychiatry, and service user partnership. The social enterprise he chairs, 'Growing Better Lives' won the 2014 sustainability award from the Royal College of Psychiatrists. He was appointed as Honorary Professor of Therapeutic Environments and Relational Health at Nottingham University's School of Sociology and Social Policy in 2015.