

EDITORIAL

Damian McCann and Wayne Bodkin

In addressing matters pertaining to sexuality, we heeded the advice of Sigmund Freud when he emphasised the importance of using straightforward language and confronting uncomfortable truths, akin to calling a “cat a cat”. Additionally, Freud expressed the necessity of facing challenges and embracing potential disruptions in order to achieve a desired outcome, symbolised by his analogy of breaking eggs to make an omelette. In the process of preparing this special edition of *Couple and Family Psychoanalysis*, we encountered considerable obstacles, much like the act of breaking eggs. However, we remain optimistic that you will find satisfaction in the final product, likening it to relishing a delightful omelette.

The best way of speaking about such things is to be dry and direct; and that is at the same time the method furthest removed from the prurience with which the same subjects are handled in “society,” and to which girls and woman alike are so thoroughly accustomed. I call bodily organs and processes by their technical names, and I tell these to the patient if they—the names, I mean - happen to be unknown to her. “J’appelle un chat un chat” [“I call a cat a cat”] (Freud, 1905e, p. 48)

He further goes on to say:

The right attitude is: pour faire une omelette il faut casser des oeufs [“to make an omelette, one has to break eggs”]. (ibid., p. 49)

Sigmund Freud regarded sexuality as the underlying foundation of neuroses and, consequently, as the very cornerstone of psychoanalysis. Even today, sexuality remains positioned at the core of psychoanalysis and, consequently, at the very essence of neurosis.

This leads us to our theme of this special edition “Turning a blind eye: sexual violence in couple and family relationships”. As psychoanalysts working with couples and families we are often confronted by sexual violence. What does it mean? How do we speak to sexual violence? Despite the increasing concern about domestic abuse, sexual violence within couple and family relationships remains hidden, is often unreported, and is little understood.

Understanding the nature, extent, causes, and treatment interventions relating to sexual violence in couple and family relationships provides a particular focus for this special edition.

Wayne Bodkin, in his article on “Turning a blind eye to incest”, suggests that the complexity and diversity inherent in delineating the contours of incest

bespeak the challenges that confront us, and which reveal the mosaic formed by different familiar, social, and legal structures. Indeed, the intentional act of overlooking, a deliberate blindness, creates a rich terrain for exploration in the realm of psychoanalysis. Working within a French context, he outlines the story of Sylvie and Olivier who are referred to the forensic unit at the hospital where Wayne works, following the disclosure of sexual abuse by their eldest teenage son. The parents are clearly struggling to take in what has happened and try to convince themselves and Wayne that they are a respectful middle-class family with well-functioning children. However, incestuous relationships thrive in an environment of secrecy and silence and Wayne outlines the environmental conditions that give rise to sexual abuse within families and suggests that addressing the trauma of incest requires not only treating the sexual aspect but also attending to the broader dynamics of lineage and family history.

Anna Motz suggests that there are some couples whose attraction seems to be made in hell. They are bound inextricably through unconscious and perverse forces and together engage in abusive practices, both against one another and themselves. At times their perverse activity extends to their children, who are seen as objects to be used for their own gratification. At other times the sadomasochistic forces are directed towards one another alone and here one person becomes (albeit temporarily) the perpetrator and the other takes the role of victim. Anna describes the pull to a perverse state of mind, in which the wished-for object can be controlled and manipulated, and she explores the development of perverse relationships, and the unconscious forces that maintain them. She also considers how a retreat to perversion (“perverse safe havens”) offers a defence against intimacy and relates to childhood trauma in which the internal couple is a damaged or damaging one. Through the use of a case example in which a female perpetrator of violence is seen in the forensic service, Anna outlines in detail her work with Paula and its impact on Anna as she attempted to make contact with her. She concludes her article with an examination of intimate partner violence, cruelty to animals, and the development of sadism.

Ariel Nathanson, through the lens of domestic abuse, examines the ways in which young boys exposed to their father’s aggression enact aspects of the abuse in their own interpersonal relationships (“Just like his dad”). Writing from a personal and clinical perspective, he offers insights into the intergenerational transmission of abuse, as these boys attempt to work through their traumas. In one example, we learn of an adolescent boy’s sadomasochistic consensual sexual play that went too far. Invoking the concept of benign aggression, Ariel illustrates how psychological solutions and enactments that these young men develop actually disable their capacity for development and for intimacy. “However, therapy can help prevent the addictive and exciting pull towards simple solutions, addictions, and tyrants by maintaining the painful link to reality, addressing trauma, and tolerating the ordinary stresses of life” (p. 45, this issue).

Damian McCann examines the nature of sexual violence in the lives and relationships of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender individuals and couples. Despite the concerns regarding disclosure, figures suggest a higher incidence of sexual abuse for gender and sexual minorities than the general population, abuse that encompasses both hate crimes as well as abuse within intimate partner relationships. Case scenarios are used to highlight the existence of discrimination, rejection, and abuse and the article concludes with an examination of clinical considerations and implications for practitioners in working with difference and attending to implicit bias.

Stefani Goerlich suggests that although many clinicians would describe themselves as “kink aware” there remains no universally adopted educational curriculum for working with kink clients and many clinicians report crucial deficits in their knowledge which could result in them approaching their kinky clients from a potentially pathologising perspective. The challenge for clinicians is to understand and accept that their kinky client is acting from a place of personal agency and informed consent. In that regard, issues of power and control, central to the BDSM and kink relationship is carefully considered and unpacked. However, the stigma that surrounds BDSM and kink generally within the profession and the minority stress experienced by those who practice kink often leads to concealment resulting in an increase in mental health difficulties. In an effort to help practitioners, Stefani draws a crucial distinction between what she terms “normative healthy kink” from that which could be described as “deviant”. The interplay of power and control within BDSM, however, is *power-with*, not power-over. To that end, the Four P’s Framework is offered to help kinky clients evaluate the coercive or collaborative nature of their relationships.

Mathieu Lacambre focuses on intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV) within couple relationships and given the risk, suggests that intervention needs to be both comprehensive and multidisciplinary. He suggests that, at a collective level, it is through a strong commitment to public policies of sexual health, education, and justice that we can tackle this complex and hitherto neglected process. Psychotherapy clearly has an important role to play in providing a secure and safe space for partners to explore the presence of sexual violence within the couple relationships and to address the issues concerned. With the deconstruction of patriarchy, the greater equality of the sexes, same-sex unions and new forms of couplehood, Mathieu believes that there is now greater freedom of choice and expression of sexuality within relationships. He defines both intimate partner violence and intimate partner sexual violence and offers an insight into the psychopathological processes underpinning such violence. Drawing on his work with a couple he saw following the wife’s attempted suicide, we see the power play that exists between the couple that results in a specific sexual attack by the wife on her body, as a means for regaining control of the dynamic between the couple. Essentially, Mathieu provides a clear insight into the serious consequences of

sexual abuse within the intimacy of couple and family relationships and addresses preventative measures.

This special issue is enriched by a compilation of four book reviews and two arts reviews, each contributing unique perspectives. Gael Beckett, our esteemed South African colleague, captivates us with her review of *Winnie and Nelson: Portrait of a Marriage* written by Jonny Steinberg. This insightful review takes us on a journey to South Africa, exploring the complex dynamics of the iconic relationship between Winnie and Nelson Mandela.

Moving further, we delve into the past through Damian McCann's review of the republished book *Marital Violence: The Community Response* by M. Borkowski, M. Murch, and V. Walker. This thought-provoking review delves into the subject matter of marital violence, painting a comprehensive picture of the community's role in addressing this pervasive issue forty years ago. Continuing our exploration, Catriona Wrottesley presents a captivating review of *The Marriage Question: George Eliot's Double Life*. It delves into the life and work of George Eliot, born as Mary Anne Evans, who defied societal norms by forging her own path. This review contemplates themes such as freedom, choice, true love, the mistreatment of women by men, desire's boundaries, and the interplay between creativity and love. Repeatedly, it poses the question: How can a woman lead a creative life whilst experiencing love to the fullest? Concluding our journey, we arrive in Dublin with Megan Nolan's novel, *Acts of Desperation*, expertly reviewed by Sophie Bellamacina. Nolan's work primarily revolves around the captivating yet destructive nature of sadomasochistic relationships. However, it delves deeper, contemplating the intricate power dynamics that emerge within such ambiguous relationships. In a striking parallel, it resonates with the case example presented by Mathieu Lacambre within the pages of this issue.

In terms of the arts reviews, opinions were divided amongst audiences regarding the stage adaptation of Hanya Yanagihara's novel, *A Little Life*, directed by Ivo Van Hove, which premiered at London's West End theatres, including the Harold Pinter Theatre and Savoy Theatre. Martha Doniach's review acknowledges that whilst some viewers perceived it as a purposeless portrayal of human suffering, others hailed it as a triumph, effectively illustrating the harrowing impact of childhood abuse on a single individual. Shifting our focus to São Paulo, Brazil, in the second review we encounter actor, producer, and lyricist Clara Verdier and her short film titled *I Have A Voice*. Rooted in an original song crafted by Clara Verdier and Bibi Cavalcante, the film delves into the fragments of Clara's childhood memories, resurfacing as she recounts her experience of suffering sexual abuse at the tender age of eight. In sharing her trauma with the audience, Clara sheds light on the profound impact of such abuse.

Through the lens of various artistic expressions and the analysis of literary works, the arts and book reviews provide us with a vibrant and imaginative depiction of diverse couple and family dynamics.

The prestigious *Couple and Family Psychoanalysis* annual New Writer Prize for 2024 is now accepting submissions. This competition presents a remarkable opportunity for both students and qualified clinicians, particularly those who have not yet published any articles, chapters, or books within the realm of couple and family psychotherapy. Entrants are invited to submit an original article demonstrating a psychoanalytically informed piece of work. The winners of this esteemed prize will have the privilege of having their article published in the *Couple and Family Psychoanalysis* journal. Additionally, they will be awarded a cash prize of £400 and enjoy a one-year subscription to the journal, encompassing the issue featuring their published work. This accolade serves as an invaluable recognition and platform for emerging voices in the field of couple and family psychoanalysis.

We sincerely hope that you take pleasure in reading and exploring the contents of this distinctive edition, as it offers insight and celebrates the richness of relationships in all their forms.

Reference

Freud, S. (1905e). *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*. *S. E.*, 7: 1–122. London: Hogarth.