

FATAG 35th Conference

ENDINGS & BEGINNINGS

The Closure of HMP Holloway and the Future of Arts Therapies with Female Offenders

The conference took place within the walls of the institution in the prison chapel. It was opened by the Governor of HMP Holloway, Emily Thomas, who was appreciative of the Arts Therapies and the benefits they offer to complex women.

History of Art Therapy in Holloway and the ongoing need for Arts Therapies for Female Offenders: Tobias Arnup, Philippa Cronin, Suzanne Delshadian & Vickie Le Sache

The initial panel discussion was between a group of art therapists who had all worked previously at HMP Holloway. They described how, as trainees, Tobias Arnup and Philippa Cronin set up what became the arts therapies department at HMP Holloway. Initially this was done in the form of art groups on the psychiatric and medical wings. It then became an art therapy project providing an open group on the wing with inmates who had just arrived in custody. They were often traumatised, finding themselves spending their first night away from their children.

The open environment allowed for the work to be seen by nurses which enabled discussion about what the space was 'intended for'. This in turn enabled the staff to consider the usefulness of this approach. At the same time Probation was changing from a practical life intervention to a multi-agency approach and this aided a move from an unclear role into an arts therapist position.

Multi-disciplinary relationships were built on which strengthened arts therapies within the prison. It was reported that after two years of running the groups the prescribed medication of those in attendance had halved. The introduction of previous training in psychiatry was useful in thinking about the dilemma between punishment and treatment. In supervision the open discussion about the madness of the institution was a refreshing approach within such rigid confines.

The panel ended by discussing how FATAG came about due to the need to weigh up these complex dilemmas and support staff in these environments.

Onyx Art Therapy Group for Foreign Nationals: Siobhan Lennon & Zoe Atkinson

The second presentation was a description of a group for foreign nationals using the metaphor of the human life cycle to frame the beginning (conception) to the end (death). The group was initially conceived and developed by Siobhan Lennon, a student on placement with Jessica Collier. The group was facilitated by Siobhan and Zoe who agreed to run the group on an honorary basis. Following Siobhan's successful completion of her Art Therapy Masters funding was sought and a grant was offered by the Feminist Review. This allowed the group

to continue. It seemed in the group that surviving and sometimes just “being” had to be enough. Images of houses were common and often depicted using cards or boxes. The group dynamic was often similar to a “gang” with members pushed out or wanting to leave, the material often experienced as too exposing. The facilitators were challenged and denigrated. The closure of Holloway was met with mixed reaction and took many weeks to process, some of which took place over the Christmas break. This ending was experienced alongside a death in custody and it was suggested by the therapists that this might have mirrored feelings of fear, powerlessness, terror and questions about care. This may have enabled emotional deprivation to be more easily spoken about and created a common ground around feeling something is missing and that needs were not being met.

The therapists reported that many of the women who attended the group used it as their only means of support and expression.

Trauma, Art & the Borderspace - How can art psychotherapy address disturbing unconscious re-enactments of trauma in the prison environment? Jessica Collier

Jessica began by speaking about the meeting in the chapel at HMP Holloway on 25th November 2015 when the closure was announced; the same chapel in which the conference was held. At the same time as prison staff were told of the closure, George Osbourne was announcing it in the House of Commons. He spoke from one ‘outmoded Victorian institution’ about another; although actually the modern prison buildings at Holloway were completed in 1985. The prison inspectors reported that Holloway had a poor design and was unable to reach the complex needs of the women it housed. However, important information about ease of family access and city centre location was ignored. Holloway is/was the only women’s prison in London and held vulnerable women near to families. It was described as a ‘cultural haven’ by one woman who had spent most of her life in Holloway.

Jessica referenced Hans Hack ‘Dignity vs Division’ and of artmaking as ‘experiences as facts to process trauma’. She spoke about the monumental work of artist Rachel Whiteread and showed Holocaust images and sculptures which she described as a form of memory and acknowledgement of one’s own and other’s suffering which is remembered and shared. In Holloway it was not the political and societal effects of the Holocaust that were present, rather poverty, addiction, physical and sexual abuse and neglect.

Jessica also referenced Griselda Pollock and Bracha Ettinger in talking about the concept of “Wit(h)nessing”. She also discussed the propensity for prisoners and staff to unconsciously act out their own family dynamics as conversation or intimacy can be experienced as too dangerous. Art therapy can be seen as the container which might contain both the event and the encounter.

Jessica also spoke about James Gilligan and his idea that violence diminishes shame, placing it away from its opposite - pride - thus mitigating the feelings of shame. She used an example of a prisoner who had been violently sexually abused by her father. She kept this secret from her brother because he might have killed him and her mother because she was not strong enough to cope; too weak even to visit her in prison. The index offence was GBH with intent

committed on a neighbour after she had been drinking. Jessica proposed this might be a way of reacting to the situation with a justification of violence to hide the shame.

Addiction to trauma was also spoken about, highlighting that women who have been abused as children will be more likely to be abused as adults, and how defences lead to re-enactments where the abuse of power is seen everywhere except the actual abuser.

Jessica finished her talk with a question about what becomes of the gaps in our collective memory when traumatic experiences or places are removed or destroyed suddenly without adequate thought.

Psychotherapy in Holloway - Past, Present & Future: Pamela Stewart & Professor Gill McGauley

Pamela started by commenting that we were in a chapel and then asking are we at a funeral? She spoke about the requirement in forensics not to work in isolation, reminding us that there is no place for the narcissistic do-gooder. She reflected on how with the loss of the prison relationships that had been built over many years are being lost brick by brick.

Pamela referenced Freud's idea about loss being a form of madness and how if it cannot be worked through, memories cannot become creative and will remain toxic. She mentioned that when she began working at the prison she was told not to treat women like animals in a cage. "They are not there to try out your psychological ideas".

A description was given of a transgenerational Russian doll; born in prison and later having a baby in prison; of mourning being avoided and women doing well until release.

An image was offered of a woman who was visibly force-feeding her baby, funnelling food into the compliant baby whilst pouring her own story into Pamela. She described how after the death of the woman's father no one in the family spoke again. The mother was always in the pub and this woman was on the streets from the age of 15 having to care for herself. Pamela suggested the baby then effortlessly vomits all over itself getting rid of the undigested food and mother's feelings. The mother's absence of understanding guarantees repetition.

Returning to Freud the idea of mourning and melancholia was considered, whereby hope opens up new experiences and creativity so as not to repeat the negativity of the past. TS Elliott was then referenced; to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from, not farewell but fair beginning.

Gill then spoke about the differences between high secure and Holloway, how Broadmoor treats more psychosis than Personality Disorder now and in Holloway fewer women suffer from mental illness; giving the statistic of 20% of prisoners, 40% of whom are never referred for therapy.

Gill went on to describe mentalization in response to Pamela's study; as minds understanding minds. The accurate caregiver providing secure attachment to a child creates a child's

capacity to mentalize. People with personality disorder (an attachment disorder) lack the capacity to mentalize.

Gill described Fonagy's proposal that violence is a failure to mentalize. People assume it is a rational conscious decision but it is more like an explosion. She then described prisoners she had worked with who could not imagine another perspective and said things like "I liked what my mother liked" and "I can't read minds" when asked questions relating to empathy. The idea is then that if one can't mentalize, actions speak louder than words or thoughts. Deviation from what is expected doesn't allow another perspective state of "knowing negative expectation".

During the discussion, Jessica, Pamela and Gill spoke about early trauma beyond mentalization being ubiquitous in the patients they treat. It is traumatic in itself if carers inflict trauma and the effects are serious on the developing mind. This creates a legacy in preventing tools for development because one has to turn away from it.

Can people recover? Is it hard wired? It was proposed that people possibly don't think about the actual or original trauma but endure and tolerate its effects day to day. If the practitioner feels exasperated by what to do, sometimes it is effective "just to be there".

Shaw was cited, stating the relationship is most important. Be there. Take time. Try to understand (without being prescriptive or offering too much interpretation).

Psychosocial approach was commented on as a way of using art therapy to promote mentalizing, by using the MBT manual and turning verbal into visual. One exercise was given as an example where everyone has the same materials and the same amount of time and completes the same task e.g. drawn a sun, a tree etc., and everyone produces something different. These different images are mind blowing, demonstrating that we all think and experience individually but can relate. Art externalises something that can't be touched emotionally but can be connected with.

In a community that is traumatised, if the idea of trauma is touched upon people are terrified. In art they can feel safe and begin to process their terror.

"All aboard the HMS Holloway" A Dramatherapy Experiential Workshop: Lorna Downing & Lorraine Grout

Unusually, there was a dramatherapy experiential workshop offered for everyone as part of the conference. The group were invited to a standing circle, with the dramatherapists, Lorna Downing and Lorraine Grout, dressed as ship's captain and ship's mate respectively. They explained the contract. We were assured that people could participate 'as much or little' as they wanted. 'Safety island', an area of the room with cushions and a 'palm tree' were pointed out for those who wanted take the role of witness.

All participants were asked to pick a 'ticket' from a hat passed around. Each ticket had either: a dolphin, octopus, seagull or a starfish symbol, corresponding to corners of the room where there were four dressing up boxes with hats and coats. There was a sense of playfulness as the group selected token costumes, many of which were old fashioned and brought to mind boarding a large ship like the Titanic. We were introduced to the ship's bell and instructed to 'freeze' on hearing the first bell and 'unfreeze' with the second one, to allow snapshots of our experience. In our groups we were invited to create a 'life raft' using our bodies and then name it and share it with the whole group.

In the middle of the room rows of chairs had been set up to emulate the deck of a ship with an entrance/exit and the front and back and we were invited to board the ship and take a seat. The name of the ship was announced as the "HMS Holloway". The Captain and Ship's Mate sat at the front and sang, 'Leave her Johnny' which they told us was an old sea shanty. The group were encouraged to join singing the chorus to the words written up on the wall:

'Leave her, Johnny, leave her,

Oh, leave her, Johnny, leave her;

For the voyage done and the winds don't blow

And it's time for us to leave her'.

Lorna and Lorraine sang the verses to the accompaniment of a bodhran drum, including:

'Oh the work was hard and the voyage was long,

Leave her, Johnny, leave her,

The sea was high and the gales were strong.

And it's time for us to leave her'.

The ship 'set sail' on an imagined journey through stormy seas, while the song continued, until the ship's mate called out, 'Land Ahoy' This was an emotional journey for many of the participants which resonated with the closure of HMP Holloway, resonance with it being a ship and having had a crew, losing people overboard and somehow surviving.

Eventually the boat was disembarked and the groups resumed and clothes returned whilst stepping out of role. Then the initial circle was reformed and each member reflected to the group a word, relating to their individual experience. It was found to be powerful and moving, each person having experienced their own personal journey within a shared experience.

Women & Shame: Rosy Marshall

Rosy spoke about her experience of a woman convicted of GBH and how she was expecting someone quite different from the one she met – not large and scary at all. She reflected on how she couldn't think about her own feelings, possibly due to the building which she experienced as sterile vs the contamination. She likened the work of a Chopin waltz inside a

stark environment. These feelings may also have been a defence against the vulnerability and sadness. In art therapy a pot was created from clay, as something to focus on and place things in, mirroring the woman's feelings of being dead inside. She had been referred by officers who were concerned about her but also possibly the feelings that she evoked in them. When the bowl was completed the woman could talk about the death of her parents, how she had become a drug mule to pay for her brother's cancer treatment/medication in Jamaica, leaving her own children there to do so and then being incarcerated. The bowl was destroyed just after completion returning it to a lump, an amorphous object with no line or shape. Prison to her meant her life was on hold like a form of suicide. After treatment, Rosy met her in free flow and she seemed full of life.

Struggle & Resilience: Suzanne Delshadian

Suzanne spoke about goodbyes not often being possible in prison and how to have a 'good enough goodbye'. The dynamics of conflict and unresolved conflict and how society treats prisons as prisons treat inmates – shutting the doors, forgetting about them and letting them get on with it; the internal world of the inmate.

Suzanne spoke about Winnicott's 'Hate in the Countertransference' and how to treat objectively, also Rob Hill's ideas about a borderline system and the link between anxiety and control. If one is not objective then this creates over control in the therapist and as a society on prisoners.

Life after Holloway; Suzanne is now in Holland working in psychiatry and forensics in tandem and collating an annual exhibition of work by institutionalised artists working in an open studio. From a borderline state of a war zone this has moved into reflection and thinking and play.

Overview

This conference was an emotional experience for many of the participants. All the speakers and many of the attendees had worked in the prison as arts psychotherapists or psychotherapists over the previous thirty years. There was an atmosphere of loss and grief and the gathering of sympathetic colleagues offered an opportunity to process some of the difficult feelings experienced by therapists who were losing their jobs as well as therapists who had left many years before but had not had the chance to "end well".

In Memorial

Only two months after the conference at HMP Holloway Professor Gill McGauley died suddenly and unexpectedly. As well as a devastating personal tragedy for her family and friends, it was also a terrible loss for her forensic colleagues who had celebrated with her only weeks before her death when she gave her inaugural address as Professor of Medical Education and Forensic Psychotherapy at St Georges Hospital, London. Gill was a dedicated supervisor who supported her colleagues at HMP Holloway with integrity, ambition and kindness. She is greatly missed.