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A Study to Explore the Emergence of Shadow Phenomena in Integrative Psychotherapy Training Institutes

Abstract

This article takes the reader through a process of qualitative research in which I examine the role of shadow; human predisposition to destructive and hurtful behaviours, explored from the perspective of the psychotherapy training institute. Data is collected initially via a focus group, prior to in depth interviews with senior national and international integrative psychotherapy trainers, exploring how shadow phenomena may emerge and manifest in training organisations. Phenomenological enquiry is supported with the use of interpersonal process recall (Kagan, 1996) and inquiry, attunement and involvement (Erskine, 1991).

Data analysis begins with the grounded theory method of Strauss and Corbin (1998) from which evolves the heuristic enquiry approach of Moustakas (1990). The heuristic experience of the researcher is employed using dream analysis, a phenomenological research interview and critical reflection on all aspects of the research process.

Throughout, consideration is given to the possibility that shadow phenomenon are just as much a part of the caring environment, as is the experience of healing and growth through the therapeutic relationship, to which psychotherapy training organisations allegedly aspire.

It is hoped that reading this paper will stimulate practitioners to a process of self-reflection and questioning in relation to this theme and also encourage practitioner researchers in their own journey of research.

"Look for your other half - Who walks always next to you And tends to be who you aren't."
Antonio Machado

Introduction

Researchers background

I began my professional life as a general nurse, with an interest primarily in surgery. It was in this arena that I became aware of the impossibility of patients splitting their physical needs from their emotional needs and psychiatry then became the way forward for me. My curiosity lay in the way in which some hospital staff were able to desensitise themselves to the emotional impact of physical trauma which their patients experienced.

Personal Motivation

My Christian up-bringing led me to look for the loving aspects of human nature and to seek to abolish what I then understood as 'harmful and bad' behaviour. I worked as a nurse in acute psychiatry, and searching for deeper understanding of the human pain I witnessed, led me to five counselling and psychotherapy trainings in four different institutes. Human destructiveness, witnessed here has been primarily at the level of emotional and verbal, with some physical experience, mostly turned against the self. Despite years of experience, I was ill-prepared for the shadow I was to encounter as a Psychotherapy Trainer and Institute Director.

Such experience included aggression from the environment, e.g.

- Seventy letters of complaint, from 'neighbours', to 'the local council, resisting the council's readiness to allow permission to practice from the premises
- my arrival at work to find that eggs had been thrown at the front door of our premises, and to find faeces piled on the top doorstep
- a close neighbour approaching people entering our premises with "We don't want your sort here!" and incidents of verbal abuse to staff, trainees and clients
- an invasion of personal space with unordered Pizzas being delivered to, and taxis arriving at, my home, in the early hours of the morning.
- Police intervention stopped these behaviours from outside of the institute.

From within the institute,

- books were removed from a reference library and were never returned despite supportive requests

- people legitimately staying over at the Institute heard others on the premises during the night
- The Institute's office telephone bill increased by £300, when someone used the computer during the night to access internet pornography

Within training groups, members scape-goated, rejected, verbally attacked each other and experienced facilitation was needed to contain these dynamics. I learned of trainers in other areas being dismissed from member organizations for severe boundary breaches with trainees, and of qualified and trainee therapists being found guilty of offences, ranging from sexual contact to financial exploitation. Colleagues from other training organisations told me of their own similar experiences; information which had not been forthcoming prior to my asking.

Aims of the Research

The goal of this research was twofold; firstly, to enhance my skill as a psychotherapy trainer and to raise awareness in myself and others, of what is needed in integrative psychotherapy training organisations, by way of a holding environment, to contain and hopefully utilize what, perhaps, remains powerfully experienced and insufficiently addressed? Not to be aware, actually potentiates the effects of shadow. Wilber states

" -- what is ignored will actually appear in the system as an internal and massive self-contradiction and destroy the system from within" Wilber (1997:23)

And secondly, my aim is to encourage other therapists to engage in their own process of research.

Review of Literature

The assumptions I began with, to be explored in the literature, were:-

- i. that the human 'self' is co-created/recreated in the life-long process of relationships
- ii. that relating includes destructive and aggressive, as well as loving impulses, feelings, thoughts, somatic and spiritual experiences and behaviours
- iii. that some of these experiences may be primarily out of awareness

- iv. that integration, as the overall aim of integrative psychotherapy, requires working with all of the above
- v. that a pre-requisite for integration is a containing/holding environment
- vi. that relating occurs at intra-personal, interpersonal and collective levels of experiencing

that, given that psychotherapists are firstly human beings, all of the above dynamics are evident in psychotherapy training organisations.

These assumptions evidence my researcher bias, which I hoped to counterbalance by remaining open to alternative views emerging from the literature. Choice of literature was also influenced by themes emerging in the subject interviews.

I began with exploration of Jung's concepts of archetype and shadow as elucidated by Stevens (1982) and Guggenbuhl-Graig (1971), followed by the work of Bowlby (1979) and Winnicott (1971) on developmental process and Klein's (1988) writing on motiveless malignancy. I explored the work of Perls (1951) on healthy aggression and Miller (1987), who conceptualises "poisonous pedagogy", in child-rearing practices.

Environmental and transference phenomena were considered reading Erskine (1991) and Yontef (1993), and Whittaker's (1988) model of the focal conflict group.

Groupings emerging from reading were;

- the understanding of the term 'integration' and it's relevance to psychotherapy practice
- the nature of polarities and human tensions
- environmental factors
- nature versus nurture
- archetypes and archetypal influence
- the dream process
- the nature of symbolism
- body process
- containment and integration
- transference processes
- the effects of group process in institutions

I also reviewed literature pertaining to the methodology of the study.

Methodology

Using the method of phenomenological enquiry, I sought deeper and latent meanings of shadow, rendering them manifest to clearer understanding of the dynamics and experience, which unconsciously fights against the loving aspects of being human.

Inquiry, Attunement and Involvement (Erskine 1991) was used as a core relational stance, with Interpersonal Process Recall used if necessary to further the process of inquiry. These methods support the stances of dialogue and holism, which are paramount to both phenomenological research and integrative psychotherapy.

My research 'subjects' work in different parts of Europe, and data collection, in face-to-face mode, would be impractical. Whilst modern technology allows for interviews across the miles, I believed the face-to-face component of the interview process to be containing and too valuable a part of the relational aspect of interview for it to be sacrificed. For convenience then, I separated the collection and analysis of data. Collection incorporated phenomenological experience, which marries well with the underlying philosophy of integrative psychotherapy, recognizing the uniqueness of each person. Moustakas (1994) points out that subjective experience can also hold meaning for others in his belief that the heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters there is also a social and perhaps universal significance.

Analysis began with a degree of structure which paved the way for the freer approach of heuristic inquiry. The value of heuristic experience is honoured by Moustakas (1994) in his belief that when we curtail the tacit in research, we limit the possibilities of knowing.

Data Collection

Three male and three female in-depth interviews were tape-recorded. Any informal, interactive process of inquiry may be supported by the use of a "series of questions aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the person's experience" (Moustakas 1994:114), whilst, when topics are suggested with only one word, stimulating a train of thoughts and associations for the subjects, this avoids the danger of the researcher leading or pre-determining a response.

"In a depth interview that is going well, there should be hardly any need for questions as such" Oppenheim (1992:73)

Although I had available, the relational modes of interpersonal process recall, very little, other than attunement, was needed in the interviews. Sharing flowed freely for the most part. A critical reflexive evaluation, primarily in the form of dream analysis, served as a vessel for containment of my own shadow.

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Ethical Considerations

Ethically, I believe that a researcher must not seek that in others, which she is afraid to address in herself; hence, the importance of a heuristic component to the study. Finlay and Gough suggest that

"Our experience of 'otherness' arises through a process of making ourselves more transparent. Without examining ourselves, we run the risk of letting our unelucidated prejudices dominate our research findings" Finlay and Gough (2003)

This study invites the humanness of psychotherapists into the public arena and

"Conflicts over publication are likely to be particularly stark where topics of a sensitive kind are involved." Fichter & Kolb (1953:544)

The tension here lays in the researchers wish for open dissemination of knowledge, versus any public transference need to maintain the idealisation of the professional, until clients are ready to dissolve this illusion. How much of the psychotherapists wish to own shadow in the wider public field is shadow in itself, in the unwillingness to appropriately contain by holding the transference until dialogue becomes possible?

I am inviting likely painful unconscious material into awareness. Oppenheim rightly believes that

"The respondent's right to privacy and the right to refuse to answer certain questions or to be interviewed at all, should always be respected and no undue pressure should be brought to bear" Oppenheim (1992:84)

The maturity and experience of the subjects ensures their ability to make considered choices, without pressure, and to seek appropriate support should they feel the need to do so.

Data Analysis

The nature of the data is in depth, profoundly wide and varied, many layered, infiltrating the whole of human experience. Strauss and Corbin (1998)

offer a model of analysis, sufficiently structured to offer boundaries in the form of guidelines and sufficiently open to allow freedom of thought and meaning. Not to have structure might render creativity unto chaos. Both phenomenological enquiry and grounded theory have their focus initially on “unravelling the elements of experience” Moustakas (1994:4) and as such are compatible. The experience of the researcher is also valuable data and the heuristic process enables me to ‘analyse’ personal experiences, which must be inclusive of shadow. Indeed, without our own awareness we are prone to the shadow’s influence.

“The more we strive to be professional helpers who have the best interests of our clients at heart, the more we are in danger of acting out of our power-hungry shadow” Haule (1971:xiii)

Findings

Themes emerging from data, (direct quotes in italics), were:

- personality traits of schizoid, borderline and narcissistic processes,

“When the shadow comes out -- as part of someone’s personality -- in any conflict situation, they tend to be persecutory from their parent and -- reach out and strangle the child - so people get very frightened -- beyond all proportion”

- the effect of religious values on moral judgements:

“There would be a failing Christian ideology. -- My concern is that something of psychotherapy is being christianised, becoming almost too precious -- that will mean certain trainers become High Priests and Priestesses, -- at a national level, and that would worry me”

- cultural norms and ways of being socialised into identificatory groupings:

“a recognition that people lynch each other in groups and institutions -- which is the shadow aspect of group process”

- theoretical orientation:– the influence of the psychotherapy culture and its corresponding ideologies;

“in psychoanalytic groups, which seem to be very grim -- transference is in a very humourless kind of way”

- teaching styles:– parallels are drawn between shadow and a) autocratic teaching stances and b) personality traits of trainers.

“the degree to which this person held onto power – the invariable success with which she managed to evict others, was quite remarkable”

- current political position – being more guarded about working with shadow phenomena.

“In the world -- it will be considered politically incorrect. That has pervaded into psychotherapy as well. We really avoid those issues”

- Human pre-disposition to symbolic understanding as integration of splitting processes – with acknowledgement of fairy-tales, folk-lore and dreams, as processes of containment.

“a sense of being trapped -- I do have that image -- the dream was telling me that I must do some containing here.”

Discussion

In the final phase of heuristic study,

“the researcher must move beyond any confined or constricted attention to the data and permit an inward life on the question to grow, in such a way that a comprehensive expression of the essences of the phenomenon investigated is realized” Moustakas (2002:32)

A televised weather bulletin predicted dense fog. The sun breaks through in places, whilst in other areas the fog lingers for some time. My phenomenological experience was of being engrossed in this study, lost in this fog and through this immersion, insights became illuminated.

Waller defines evil as follows;

“Most would agree that – in its broadest sense – evil is anything detrimental to the well being of living things,”

and

“I define human evil as the deliberate harming of humans by other humans”

Waller (2002:12)

He distinguishes between natural evil; a function of natural change, earthquakes, floods, disease;

and moral evil; the destructive things that human beings do to each other and ourselves. Given that genetic influences colour human behaviour, distinction between the two kinds of evil is often impossible to make. I question how one would define "deliberate".

This distinction between what is nature and what is humanly induced is struggled with in subject interviews. I question whether it is part of nature's evolutionary way of survival, that human beings cause suffering to self and other in certain field conditions?

Waller (2002) considers a moral difference between deliberate harm inflicted against an acknowledged enemy and that inflicted against someone defenceless. Data suggests misperceptions and differences in interpretation, which render black and white qualification of terms such as "enemy" and "defenceless" impossible. What is intended is not always what is perceived.

Data proposes that shadow emerges both in the form of, and as a defensive result of, personal and environmental impositions on the other. Absence of negotiation may be shadow in itself, or may trigger a shadow reaction in others. At one polarity, data describes shadow as the "pain in the butt aspects of human resistance". At the other polarity, as "persecutory, highly critical, malicious, vicious, wanting to destroy", leaving its mark for years. I surmise from data that shadow which seeks to destroy others, although bringing relief in the short term, actually denies a painful aspect of self, and this diminishes the self. Hence, shadow, which superficially appears supportive, can be profoundly unhealthy.

Guggenbuhl-Craig believes that clients, under circumstances of our denial, learn from us only how to fool themselves and the world. I believe this imposition, on our trainees and our self, to be our own shadow at work. Paradoxically, the avoidance of shadow is shadow.

I distinguish between the experience of being re-traumatised in training situations and the willingness to re-experience, within the safety of a contained relationship; the difference being the degree to which one is able to retain power. Data posits *"There's always a power aspect to any training process --- and some of that comes out as shadow."*

I know from personal experience that just as the avoidance of shadow paradoxically intensifies the painful experience when it finally emerges, the welcoming of shadow dynamics reduces the intensity of pain. We can hide ourselves away from our suffering and the hiding away is suffering in itself.

The pertinent question for me here is, what internal or environmental conditions influence the willingness to remain open; to engage with the tensions in the training group struggles, with uncertainty.

Waller (2002:20) suggests that a "culture of cruelty" emerges in groups, where the role of professional socialisation, with escalating commitments, ritual conduct and repression of conscience can change people's behaviour. He believes the factors binding people to a group might include diffusion of responsibility, de-individuation and conformity to peer pressure. Guggenbuhl-Craig refers to the collective archetypal shadow as "evil", stating

"the collective shadow tries to demolish collective ideals (which) – must be subject to attack, since they are false and one-sided. Were they not continually being eaten into from the depths of the human soul, there would be neither individual nor collective development" Guggenbuhl-Craig (1999:103)

The powerful negative effects of group process are mentioned often in subject interviews, noticing that

"what's happening at those times is the scare, and that can be terrible, in adult people in training groups. When this venom shows itself, the tendency to wipe out, the hostility shows itself and then the terror they feel is enormous"

Waller notes how

"Laboratory studies indicate that in groups, we become more aroused, more stressed, and more error-prone on complex tasks. Groups tend to be more antagonistic, competitive, and mutually exploitative than individuals"

He explains also that

"Groups can develop values, institutions, and practices that promote humanitarian caring and connection" and "being in a group reveals who individuals are just as much as - being in a group alters who they are" Waller (2002:34)

Waller suggests that we can behave in ways *"either heroic or barbaric"* (Waller 2002:35). Data suggests that training groups need not discount the tension of polarities of human existence, but can rather escalate them into our awareness to utilise healthily.

How does

"The sombre fact - that we are the cruellest and most ruthless species that has ever walked the

earth; and that, although we may recoil in horror when we read -- of the atrocities committed by man upon man, we know in our hearts that each one of us harbours within himself those same savage impulses which led to murder, torture and to war" Storr (1968:9)

relate to a profession where working for the common good is encouraged? Stevens posits

" – the very milieu that makes actualisation of the Self possible also demands that certain components of the Self remain unactualised in the unconscious or be actively repressed there." Stevens (1982:221)

Guggenbuh-Craig quotes Jung,

"whenever a bright psychic content becomes lodged in consciousness, its opposite is constellated in the unconscious and tries to do harm from that vantage point" Guggenbuhl-Craig (1971:26)

Data supports holding the splitting processes, pertaining to shadow, "in a way that is not utopian or naively optimistic or pretends away the savagery and brutality of human nature, but enables us to work with it, assimilate it, transform it and to be more creative". This is seen as an endless struggle.

Data posits that "there's always a power aspect to any psychotherapy training process that people chafe with, both at the level of students, and at the level of people running the training and at every level of that, some of it comes out as shadow". Data relates "incidences of cruelty, at both wider institutional and political level", from people who are "quite totalitarian in how they go about managing power", for example, "adhering to the party line pure and simple".

Transference process is acknowledged with "I'm very familiar with this particular historical sequence, where I'm dealing with a person who over-rides all considerations of fairness in pursuit of her own power, and scapegoats people who don't conform. That pattern goes back to my experience of prep. school". The positive aspect of transference is valued with "it gave me radar for these kinds of people".

I would suggest that the stance of trainers taking full responsibility here may be an example of female shadow infantilising trainees. And the degree of process responsibility accepted by the transference object, I think, differentiates between trainer/trainee and therapist/client relationships. Data states, "woman's shadow is to keep clients dependant". Data also acknowledges the erotic transference "which might be bodily references and relate to sexual preferences" and "power and

sex. They're the two aspects of shadow -- because power is very sexy". I see the breaking of sexual boundaries between trainer and trainee as primarily transference phenomena at work.

Winnicott sees counter-transference hate as a natural occurrence regardless of the behaviour of the trainee. The data supports this view as a trainer, shares, "A big part of me hated doing it (training)" and "I felt very very resentful of the amount of work".

Data evidences the advantage of trainer confidence, and the necessary determination, which is enhanced by the belief that one deserves an institute. However, data also recognises that this element of narcissism is often accompanied by the trainer attracting authority, resulting in those around giving up their power, in feeling beholden. Data proposes that serious loss of skill emanates from this dynamic. The need for promotion of democracy in training cultures advocates "maintaining, in my training with my students, a considerable degree of freedom of speech".

Data acknowledges the importance of addressing difference,

"They confront me as to how I teach, with differences. It's what they haven't confronted me with – there's shadow!"

In the process of government registration for psychotherapy, shadow shows itself inter-denominationally as sibling rivalry, projections and dismissal. Data highlights the importance of "what we would normally do, which would be to get through the resolution of differences".

Insecurity fosters "rivalry between training organisations" resulting in "venomous letters – real paranoia that came from the other person" and behaviours of "When someone attacks, to want to attack back". Headway is being made in the process of acknowledging difference and diversity, in the formation of a new Psychotherapeutic Counselling Section of UKCP. I believe that this will assist the healing of potential paranoid ideations between counselling and psychotherapy cultures. What is needed, I think, is to go back to our roots and find what links us and not simply what divides us.

Data suggests that "Change in our field and our work is so very difficult to achieve". Given the many references in the data, to how making shadow welcome disempowers it, it would seem that trainers have an assumption that shadow behaviours are changeable or can be eradicated?

Data refers to the tension between something being sufficiently experienced for it to be worked

with, rather than denied, whilst not causing too much pain to people. That is, “if something overflows and needs to overflow, it has opportunity to do so, but nevertheless, that it is not to become the norm.” Negative experience of projective identification is perceived as potentially positive with “not that that’s a bad thing, but if you don’t use it constructively it can be”.

The question in the data, “How can we integrate it when we haven’t had that part to integrate?” supports shadow experiences being made welcome in training, for us to choose how we accommodate them into our psyche. The optimum degree is seen as one of damage limitation, and this seems to be a question of intensity. It was mooted also in the data, that shadow experience could have positive qualities. Evetts-Secker (2003) acknowledges how, sometimes, when we are depleted of energy for change in our lives, we need to resort to the energy of shadow to implement progression forwards.

Data discusses how containment, cognitively, emotionally, somatically, symbolically, consciously or unconsciously, is a necessary field condition for shadow to be experienced without becoming acted out in a damaging way. It is interesting to note that data refers only once to trainees taking responsibility for their own containment.

- From the interviews, containment is seen to be enhanced by:
 - symbolism of “theories in regard to nursery rhymes”
 - “maximising people’s freedom to express the diversity of their views, cultural preferences”
 - “reasonable containment is about time boundaries” and “modelling”
 - humour as “permitting a great deal of free expression to happen in a good natured way, that doesn’t evoke lynch mob in groups”
 - Trainer support, described as:
 - clinical supervision
 - personal therapy for psychotherapy trainers as a life-long process on a pro-re-nata basis
 - having some ordinariness in life, enjoyment of “tea and biscuits”, or “I do get into environments where I can stop being a professional

- trainer and just be a bit of a lad”; or “I like travelling on trains”
- being “clear about ourselves and common-sensical”

Creative Synthesis

Last night I dreamed of sitting at a table, shaking dice with a colleague to turn take in the pulling of soft toy cats from a paper bag, with floppy rope handles. The room surroundings, furniture, bag and cats were all shades of white and silver. My colleague drew from the bag, a black and brown live cat, which was impossible to hold. The cat ran off around the room and we could not retrieve it. I woke anxious. Moustakas values tacit knowledge;

“Underlying all other concepts in heuristic research, at the base of all heuristic discovery is the power of revelation in tacit knowing.”
Moustakas (2002:20)

In this dream, it is the shadow (real cat), which emerges unexpectedly, is untenable, pervades the space, cannot be grasped; and this results in anxiety. Shadow is not an experience that can be captured, enclosed, rendered unreal, ‘toyed’ with or sanitised into white, false, immobilised, life-less form. An existential message from this dream might be that shadow is about ‘letting the cat out of the bag’, or that one ‘cannot get a handle’ on shadow.

I think that attempts to ‘cat’egorise shadow can, at best, only be useful in the understanding of the depth and breadth of the phenomena. The more we attempt to grasp shadow experience, the more it evades us. Shadow is elusive.

Conclusion

The study suggests

- That male and female shadow inhabit different relational dynamics at the contact boundary; to push (deny other) and to pull (suffocate other), respectively
- That the culture of the sacrificial lamb, evident in some psychotherapy training cultures, as grandiosity in the form of martyrdom to a cause, results in the painful disempowerment of trainees
- That shadow emerges in the differing forms of subtle leakage or of overtly bursting
- That shadow may emerge as somatic experience, which can be potentially very destructive or life threatening for the

recipients – many female trainers undergo hysterectomy, physically being unable to symbolically ‘mother’.

- That the kinder human qualities encouraged in psychotherapy training are superficial only, if shadow qualities are not also worked with, and that the not working with shadow is likely to overtly or subtly cause harm.
- That there is inter-organisational movement amongst trainees and currently no UKCP guidelines to monitor this process.
- That the age-old professional split between counselling and psychotherapy is in the very new position of engaging in a potentially healing process.
- That the profession is imbued with paradox and polarities; and people become hurt when the tension of optimum balance between opposites is not held.

The study realises that energy from shadow experience not only needs addressing to prevent harm, but needs addressing to promote growth. Human growth encouraged without shadow is phenomenologically superficial, ungrounded and potentially short-lived. Further research might be employed to explore each aspect of shadow in more detail. This research is currently being expanded upon in the writing of a book, with a contract for publication, on this theme.

The study falls short if it does not encourage psychotherapists to rethink their own philosophical bases. Humanism proposes that people are basically good. We are more likely to achieve that aim when we face up to the reality of human destructiveness. Waller states

“Man is neither good nor evil. If one believes in the goodness of man as the only potentiality, one will be forced into rosy falsifications of the facts, or end up in bitter disillusionment” Waller (2002:137)

And the way forward?

“-- ignorance is no guarantee of security, and in fact only makes our insecurity still worse. It is probably better, despite our fear, to know where the danger lies. To ask the right question is already half the solution of a problem” Jung (1959:23)

The psychotherapist

“--- must wrestle with the dark, uncanny forces in himself and others. It is only through repeated confrontations with the shadow that

he can fulfil his task. He cannot, like the biblical Isaac, spend just one night wrestling with the angel to win his blessing. His struggle for the blessing must last a lifetime” Guggenbuhl-Craig (1971:142)

In psychotherapy training institutes we can do no more than stay aware and vigilant to this powerful phenomenon.

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