

## **HOMOSEXUALITY AND PSYCHOANALYTIC TRAINING: STRUGGLES IN ENGLAND AND NORTH AMERICA - WHAT IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA?**

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In May 1995 a Letter of Concern (LOC), signed by 180 psychotherapists (Appendix A), with a covering letter from Andrew Samuels (1995a), a training analyst of the Society of Analytical Psychology, was sent to The Secretary of State for Health in Britain. The LOC expressed concern about issues related to negative and defensive attitudes towards training homosexuals as psychotherapists. I obtained a copy of this correspondence whilst visiting in July 1995. Later that year, in October 1995, at an International Psychoanalytic Association conference in America, I overheard a discussion between a senior training and supervising analyst at an extremely prestigious Institute for Psychoanalysis (Dr T), and a Clinical Faculty member of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of California (Sharone Abramowitz), in which the latter refused again, an invitation to train as an analyst. This was because of the negative attitude towards homosexuality held by training analysts.

These circumstances, together with Young's interesting and provocative article "Is 'perversion' obsolete?" (**PINS 21**, 1996) have prompted me to report something of their content. My aim is to generate discussion leading to some theorising around concrete issues of the well known, though covert, widespread exclusion of homosexuals<sup>1</sup> from psychoanalytic training. Given that this topic, as far as I know, has never been raised for public debate in South Africa, it seems timely to draw attention to it now, particularly since we are the first country in the world which has a constitutional clause prohibiting discrimination of any sort on the basis of a person's identification as a lesbian or a gay man.

I will first cover the discussion I overheard between Dr T and Sharone Abramowitz who, together with Betsy Kaskoff (a psychotherapist in San Francisco) presented at a workshop entitled "The self and orientation: New perspectives on psychoanalysis and homosexuality: Female homosexuality, presentation and response" at the *18th Annual Conference on the Psychology of the Self - Crosscurrents in Self Psychology*, held in San Francisco (ironically the so-called gay capital of the world) in October last year. I will then summarise the documents (quoting extensively from them) which I obtained in England, adding academic weight to some of the comments by referring to other literature in the field.

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<sup>1</sup>. I include in this term lesbians and gay men

Abramowitz's section of the workshop was impressive. Her paper drew on postmodern ideas to discuss sexuality in ways which are not delimited by classical psychoanalytic theory, which is often used to pathologise homosexuality (Abramowitz, 1995; Elliot, 1994; see also Glassgold and Iasenza, 1995). The paper provides the space for a different theorisation and more productive psychotherapeutic work with lesbians, as was evident in Kaskoff's moving and personally mirroring account of her work, as a lesbian therapist, with a lesbian patient. The discussant, Dr T, from her public response, was clearly impressed with both presentations. She suggested they submit them for publication, to which Abramowitz commented that because of their orientation, she doubted either would be published by any mainstream analytically oriented journal.

As I too was impressed with the theoretical paper, I approached Abramowitz to invite her to submit her paper to a special issue of the **South African Journal of Psychology**, of which I was a guest editor. Whilst waiting to speak with her I (over)heard<sup>2</sup> Dr T (who had also approached the podium), say that she was sorry that Abramowitz persisted in not putting herself forward for training as an analyst. Dr T then, once again, invited her to do so. Abramowitz said she was flattered to have been asked yet again to apply by such an eminent member of the fraternity. But, she said, she would not do so because of the attitude towards homosexuality held by the training institutes. Dr T insisted that attitudes had changed and Abramowitz challenged this. Dr T commented that it was now formally accepted that it is illegal in North America to discriminate against homosexuals wanting to train. Abramowitz insisted that whilst this might be a public position, she would not risk going into training analysis because of her on-going negative experience of training analysts generally, and especially in San Francisco. She said that whilst there may be a rule against such discrimination this had not changed the theoretical position and practice of seeing the sexual orientation of lesbians and gay men in terms of pathology.

According to a colleague in Canada (Ellen Lewinberg<sup>3</sup>), until very recently there was no training in North America for people who defined themselves as homosexuals. She comments that the reason for this was that homosexuality was seen as an illness but that recent work on gender has gone a long way to change that perception. However, Lewinberg (personal communication) said that Abramowitz was "probably right when she said that she would not put herself in the hands of any training analysts, as a lesbian. Most of them were trained classically and even if they consider themselves to be self psychologists, seem to be homophobic, (probably a gross exaggeration but according to a number of friends who do define themselves as homosexuals, completely accurate in Toronto)". Lewinberg also commented that she did not know of any people who define themselves as homosexual being accepted for training at the older institutes, but added that this was not an issue at either the Training and Research Institute in Self Psychology (New York), or the Institute for the Advancement of Self Psychology in Toronto. Nor is it "supposedly an issue any longer at any institute". This would corroborate Dr T's response to Abramowitz, but certainly the latter remained unconvinced in October 1995. Whether anything has changed remains to be seen, but given that there are several papers being given at the *19th Annual Conference of The Psychology of The Self: Reconceptualizing the*

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<sup>2</sup>. Since this is tantamount to eavesdropping, I hope that Dr. T and Abramowitz will not object to having this conversation reported in the paper.

<sup>3</sup>. Director, Faculty and Supervisor, Institute for the Advancement of Self Psychology, Toronto; Supervisor, Toronto Child Psychotherapy Program

*Clinical Exchange*, to be held in Washington in October 1996, on the complexities rather than the pathologies of all types of sexuality, it certainly appears that the topic is up for discussion, at least in some psychoanalytic circles in North America.

What of Britain? From the following summary of the British debate and drawing on the work of Elliot (1994), it seems that defining oneself as lesbian or a gay man is a risky thing to do if one wants to train as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist in Britain<sup>4</sup>. Generally it seems that homosexuality continues to be pathologised, but this is not openly admitted or debated - instead it seems to be a subtle, covert and defensive position apparently taken by the majority of the senior and junior<sup>5</sup> members in the training institutions involved.

In April 1995, Professor Charles Socarides<sup>6</sup> was invited to give the Annual Lecture of the Association for Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy (APP). The title of his paper was "Advances in the psychoanalytic theory and therapy of male patients who are homosexual". Following the public announcement of this lecture by Socarides, a Letter of Concern (LOC) was sent for publication to six leading professional journals. The letter was signed by 180 registered psychotherapists (mainly psychoanalytic psychotherapists) or practitioners who hold or have held posts in the National Health Service in which the practice of psychotherapy forms part of their duties. The journals to which the letter was sent were chosen because of their standing in the field of psychotherapy and because of the links that apparently exist between the journals and the APP. These included:

1. **Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy** (the APP's journal);
2. **International Journal of Psycho-Analysis** (published by the Institute of Psycho-analysis);
3. **Journal of Analytical Psychology** (published on behalf of the Society of Analytical Psychology, London);
4. **British Journal of Psychotherapy** (sponsored by a number of psychotherapy organisations including the Lincoln Clinic, and the Institute of Psychotherapy (a member of the British Confederation of Psychotherapists) which thereby has a representative seat on the editorial board);
5. **Journal of the British Association of Psychotherapists** (the journal of the British Association of Psychotherapists); and
6. **British Journal of Psychiatry** (published by the Royal College of Psychiatrists - all consultant psychiatrists are members of the Royal College).

The LOC noted that Professor Socarides is well known for his view that: "homosexuality is in itself a severe psychopathological condition, warding off the dread of 'castration, fragmentation, separation anxieties and other conflicts' and he is explicit that the task of the analyst is to 'spoil the perverse gratification' enabling the patient to 'progress along the road to heterosexual functioning'" (LOC, 1995:2-3). It also drew attention to the fact that Professor Socarides has actively campaigned against moves by psychiatrists to curtail efforts to "cure" homosexuality. The LOC

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<sup>4</sup>. According to Professor Gill Straker (personal communication), this is not true of some of the Integrative Psychotherapy training programmes in Britain

<sup>5</sup>. A recent visitor from one such institute made the following comment: "... we have now discovered that homosexuality IS always a pathology"

<sup>6</sup>. Socarides, described by Gould (1995) as a "leading pathologizer of homosexuality" since 1972 (Gould, 1995: 4-5)

expressed concern therefore that because of the APP's invitation to Socarides, it was reasonable to assume that the APP endorses and associates "itself with his views or as implying that a consensus exists within the profession of psychotherapy, including psychoanalytic psychotherapy, that is in line with Professor Socarides' views" (LOC, 1995:3). This was a construction with which the signatories of the LOC did not want to be associated, and therefore they hoped that the letter would openly invite the APP to make its position clear.

Anxiety was expressed in the LOC about the impact that such a belief (i.e. that there is a consensus within the profession that is in line with Socarides' view) would have on the public. There are, they pointed out, implications for those who want to train and also those who might want to make use of the services provided by the NHS.

On training, the LOC pointed out that in Britain those who have trained at the Institute of Psycho-Analysis are more likely to obtain promotion to the level of Consultant Psychotherapist in the NHS. Yet the Institute is well known to "operate a policy of discrimination against potential trainees whose sexual orientation is homosexual" (Letter of Concern, 1995:4; see also Elliot, 1994). Further, according to the LOC (and also Elliot, 1994), other private psychoanalytic and psychoanalytic psychotherapy training organisations which also lead to promotions within the system (i.e. not only the Institute of Psycho-Analysis), also either practice absolute discrimination "based on theoretical beliefs that homosexuals can never be sufficiently free from psychopathology to become psychoanalysts or psychoanalytic psychotherapists" (LOC, 1995:4-5). Others practice effectual discrimination in which, for example, "higher standards of mental health and personal behaviour are demanded of lesbians and gay men who apply to train in these institutions" (LOC, 1995:5). The most alarming aspect of this is that there is a reluctance on the part of these institutions to debate their views publicly (LOC, 1995:), or even at all (Ellis, 1994). It is well known that lesbians and gay men who do manage to train are often forced to keep their sexual orientation secret because their professional position is compromised or uncomfortable if 'out' (Ellis, 1994). It would be interesting to know what happens in South Africa. Are lesbians and gay men, for example, explicit in their applications for places in clinical and counselling masters training programmes at our universities?

To return to Britain, the LOC pointed out that this kind of discrimination against potential candidates for training, arising from institutional adherence to a set of views about homosexuality, clearly calls into question the adequacy of standards of the practice of psychotherapy. Prejudicial viewpoints obviously silence any chance of alternative views being expressed and debated. Contemporary viewpoints on sexuality and hetero / homo / bi-sexual orientation simply do not find a voice.

A second alarming implication of a public view that the APP supports Socarides' view is the inevitable (and very real - see, for example, Kitzinger and Perkins, 1993) possibility that gay or lesbian taxpayers are unlikely to seek help from the NHS, believing (appropriately) that they and their partners would be stigmatized as pathological and their relationships devalued.

The LOC considered these issues to have reached the level of a "public scandal" (p6) and the signatories called on the APP to:

- "1. distance itself publicly from the views of Professor Socarides concerning homosexuality and psychopathology;
2. convene a meeting before the end of 1996 at which a wide spread of opinions on these matters could be debated in a proper manner;
3. write a letter to each of the organisations, membership of which leads to eligibility for Full Membership of APP, urging them to (1) review their procedures, regulations and habitual practices so as to remove any direct or indirect discrimination against potential candidates for training on grounds of sexual orientation; and (2) to make discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation an ethical offence in relation to selection of candidates for training, the ongoing practice of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy, and the conduct of professional life generally."

A copy of the LOC was sent with a covering letter from Andrew Samuels (1995a), a training analyst (Society of Analytical Psychology), to Virginia Bottomley, the Secretary of State for Health in Britain. In it he pointed out that the 180 signatories to the LOC, that included professors of psychiatry and psychotherapy, consultant psychotherapists and psychiatrists, and fully qualified psychotherapists of all orientations, including psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic psychotherapists - was an impressive number given that the letter was "in no way a petition aimed at securing a huge return<sup>7</sup>. Rather, it was circulated informally in the profession" (Samuel, 1995:1).

Samuels (1995a:1) added that although many more signatories than the number of letters circulated had been received, because of the delicate and controversial nature of the contents, "many people in the profession have been frightened to put their names to this letter, some gay, but others simply because they feared for their chances of promotion, or survival of their jobs". He commented that this was alarming, not because he felt that all NHS psychotherapy is homophobic, but because there is a need for exploration of the issue in a full and undefensive matter.

In a later document Samuels (1995b) reported that there had been a positive response from the Department of Health who undertook to look into the various matters raised in the Letter. The British Psychological Society (BPS) wrote supportively, and media coverage was apparently extensive and favourable<sup>8</sup>. However, none of the journals listed above accepted the LOC for publication. The **British Journal of Psychiatry** did pass it on to be published in an abbreviated version in the **Bulletin of the Royal College of Psychiatrists**. All the others made various excuses, mostly saying that they did not publish letters on professional political issues. They persisted with this line of defence, even when it was pointed out to be "demonstrably untrue" (Samuels, 1995b).

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<sup>7</sup>. It is noteworthy that people working at the Tavistock Institute in London are conspicuous by their absence from the list of signatories.

<sup>8</sup>. It is noteworthy that, following the process reported above, the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy's Ethics Committee is proposing to explicitly formalise a position in which trainees will not be discriminated against on the grounds of their sexual preference. (Professor G. Straker, personal communication)

Samuels (1995b) also commented that "two journals behaved very oddly". The **Journal of Analytical Psychology** turned down the LOC even though nine of its own editorial board had signed it. The **British Journal of Psychotherapy** accepted it but, in a subsequent telephone call, the editor told Samuels that, in spite of the board's decision, she was unilaterally refusing to publish the letter. None of the six intended journals published the letter, and for the historical record and in the interest of debate on an important subject **Free Associations** published it in late 1995.

Alarming, Samuels (1995b) concluded that the censorship "has a degree of coordination to it. My own belief is that the issue is in fact the same one highlighted in the LOC itself: the dominant position of the Institute of Psycho-Analysis in British psychoanalytic psychotherapy. There is a colossal fear of offending the Institute". This view is also borne out by Ellis's (1994) recent experience, and supported by some of the very few critiques of psychoanalysis as an institution. For example, Balint's (1939) comment that Freud's emphasis was on the "submission of trainees to a long and severe discipline under an authority which would be prepared to instruct and admonish, designed to protect psychoanalysis from further secessions .... leading to smaller competing institutions which have relied for survival on their safe, trustworthy and loyal followers" (in Elliot, 1994:515).

Clearly, attempts to establish whether psychoanalytic training programmes do discriminate against lesbians and gay men are first, risky, especially for trainees because of their vulnerability to the views of their supervisors and teachers. To ask such questions is to bravely face "a conformist group as a nonconformist individual, a strain to which only a few can stand up" (Balint, in Elliot, 1994:515). Secondly, such attempts are extremely difficult. A simple question along these lines will not establish this as Ellis (1994) discovered: the widespread and evasive position tends to be that such persons may be excluded on other grounds than their sexual orientation.

I have not attempted to establish whether our local institutes and training institutions have *formal* positions on this issue. Perhaps this is something that could be researched more fully. This would be more than an interesting piece of research - it is essential information. Of course, using Abramowitz's persistent refusal to train, even though discrimination is illegal, there is the very real and pessimistic fear that a formal position making discrimination of this sort illegal, will not change the widespread practice of pathologizing homosexuality by individuals in their practice. However, I hope that this discussion will at least act as a springboard for important debate in this journal and elsewhere, leading ultimately, I would hope, to better and more ethical practice in the field of psychotherapy.

**Note.** I would like to thank the "heavy hand" of Grahame Hayes, the **PINS** editor, with editorial help on this article.

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Samuels, A (1995a) Covering letter to Virginia Bottomley, together with the Letter of Concern (180 signatories - see Appendix A).

Samuels, A (1995b) Introductory material for the Letter of Concern.

Young, R M (1996) Is "perversion" obsolete? **PINS, 21**, 5-26.

## **Appendix A.**

The 180 signatories of the Letter of Concern.

This took up five and a half pages: 66-71.











