Context, narrative, and social inequity: politicised therapeutic responses to political context

Sarah Walther and Paolo Bertrando

Research consistently indicates that social inequity is one of the factors most significantly associated with mental health issues. Despite this, the range of discussion about mental health interventions seems to have become reduced to the diagnosis and alleviation of symptoms, rather than the diagnosis and alleviation of social inequity.

Socio-political theories offer a number of suggestions about why and how this ‘disconnect’ between mental health and social equity has occurred at political, service and practice levels. The same happened on the theoretical level: the prevalent political and economical context influences therapeutics theories, that today tend to overlook the social and political dimension of practice.

One pragmatic effect of this disconnect has been to invite competition between therapeutic approaches about the best way to address mental health symptoms, decentring and invisibilising the connections with social inequity.

In this seminar, we wish to speak together, as a systemic practitioner and a narrative practitioner, in a way which avoids a reproduction of this dichotomizing, reductionism and competition. Instead, we wish to emphasise how our shared interest in relational ways of working and socio-economic contexts can generate therapeutic practices which attempt to address the real effects of social inequity.

We hope this will create a space for:

- An alternative approach to thinking about the similarities and differences between systemic family therapy and narrative family therapy. Rather than asking the reductionist question of “What are these differences?” we will ask the more expansionist question of “What can these differences do?” What possibilities in practice can these differences create?
- A possibility of considering our own preferred theories and techniques as the product of the context they are embedded in, rather than abstract model that live outside history
- A re-centring on the importance of a shared concern for narrative family therapy and systemic family therapy; how can we address issues of social inequity both inside and outside therapeutic conversations?
- The proposal of a framework to locate concerns in social and relational contexts
- A discussion of politicised therapeutic practices – either systemic or narrative - which extend beyond the therapy room in order to respond to the politicised experience of social inequity.
FRIDAY 19TH SEPTEMBER

2.00 - 3.15PM - 5 workshops will be on offer, these being:

1. **TITLE: 'Systemic Therapy and Attachment Narratives'**

   **PRESENTERS:** Arlene Vetere and Rudi Dallos

   This workshop presents our integration of attachment theory with narrative theory and systemic theory and practice. This integration offers both an explanatory framework for the development of distress in family relationships and guidance for intervention.

2. **TITLE: A cybernetics of tendencies: towards a new coherence for systemic family therapy**

   **PRESENTERS:** David Pocock

   The irreverence of constructivist, constructionist, narrative, dialogical and other manifestations of the postmodern turn in systemic family therapy have, with time, become revered as the new orthodoxy. Where might irreverence take us now? Or might irreverence itself be a self-serving trope far removed from the need to remain relevant in public agencies and their evidence-based agendas?

   David will track back through the various twists, turns and splits in our professional genealogy that have produced the somewhat fragmented collection of ideas that now count as contemporary family therapy. He will argue that it was the perceived need to counter the apparent excesses of positivist science that allowed postmodernism to flourish in our field. He will then make the case that we got this wrong — that there is more to science than positivism allows and that the split between our scientific realist wings and our constructionist / narrative wings is not only unhelpful but unnecessary. He will argue that much contemporary family therapy is trapped in an ‘epistemic fallacy’ which assumes that all that can be known is knowledge itself; not what lies beyond ideas.

   Bhaskar’s critical realism will be intersected with Bateson’s vision of the ecology of mind to outline a ‘cybernetics of tendencies’ in which ideas, beliefs, discourses, political structures are understood to have potential causal powers interacting in an — often unpredictable — manner in the same way that genes, atoms and other physical open systems do. This allows a new coherence for systemic therapy in which our old familiar splits of positivist versus postmodern, systemic versus analytic, individual versus relational, first versus second order and structural versus poststructural need no longer be so compelling.

   Finally, David hopes to demonstrate through clinical examples how these philosophical ideas, through making these splits unsustainable, have profoundly practical consequences in opening up afresh the richness of systemic thinking for the benefit of those we seek to help.

3. **TITLE: Which semantics is leading the conversation? Family Semantic Polarities as a guide for the choice of the therapeutic dance**

   **PRESENTERS:** Valeria Ugazio and Lisa Fellin
One size definitely does not fit all. Drawing on the core ideas of Ugazio’s (1998/2013) Family Semantic Polarities (FSP) model, this workshop will explore how we need to choose different therapeutic pathways according to the family semantics.

Through videoclips, verbatim transcripts of family therapy sessions and self-exploring activities this workshop will engage participants in different kinds of dances, i.e. different semantic worlds brought to life by therapeutic conversations where clients position the therapist in their own semantics. “The crucial variable that shapes the therapeutic relationship is the dominant semantics in the patient’s conversational contexts” (Ugazio, p.263). The therapists are offered many different possibilities in bringing seemingly irreconcilable semantic worlds and emotions into the conversation, or to encourage the creation of new semantic worlds. But some possibilities are easily taken on by the therapists, being in tune with their own semantics, while others are ignored or neglected. Moreover “certain therapy stories that are possible in one type of semantics — in the sense of being productive, easy to implement, boding well for change — are forbidden in another, in the sense that they are difficult to develop, incapable of making best use of family and personal resources, destined to encourage dropping out or dysfunctional circuits” (ibidem, 275). The participants will be stimulated to actively explore their own semantic polarities and to use them as resources for therapy.


4. TITLE: not yet available

PRESENTER: Jim Wilson

ABSTRACT

Not yet available.

From 3.45pm – you may attend one of the 11 fringe activities and workshops

1. Title: ‘A moveable feast?’ Knowing and not knowing about culture(s)

Lead Presenter: Dr Iyabo Fatimilehin (Director/Consultant Clinical Psychologist, Just Psychology CIC)

Additional Presenter: Shameem Eusuf (Cultural Consultant, Just Psychology CIC)

The United Kingdom has an increasingly diverse population including people who have migrated here from many different parts of the world. It is impossible for any therapist to know everything there is to know about every culture and subculture in the UK. This workshop will explore ways of
knowing and not knowing about culture(s). It will explore the value and limitations of cultural consultancy using interactive exercises such as small group discussion, metaphor and role play.

2. Title: Reflecting Puppets Shows and Reflecting Role Plays: Therapeutic performances to capture the interest of children.

PRESENTER: Pete Brown, Family Therapist, working with children and families in Greenwich CAMHS, South London.

Family therapy practice can be stimulated by using action methods that capture the interest of children in the therapeutic process. I have been interested in developing more child-centred reflecting teams that aim to help engage children of all ages.

In my experience, puppet shows and role plays lead to an increased repertoire of child friendly comments in reflecting teams which includes children more fully in sessions. Wearing a glove puppet and using a playful improvisational approach can feel uncomfortable, but with practice becomes easier. Often as therapists we have to take 'relational risks', as Barry Mason says - in doing something different to make a difference to the therapeutic encounter.

Underpinned by the notion of ‘serious play’ from a narrative perspective, the workshop hopes to encourage participants to experiment with reflecting team practices so that puppet shows or role plays can be considered as part of the repertoire of reflecting team practice.

I will present an overview of when the shows or role plays may be introduced and then show video clips so participants can see these ideas in action. Finally, for those wishing to try out these ideas in the workshop, there should be an opportunity to do some practice.

Further reading:

3. Title: "Leaving the Garden of Eden": Internet sex, young people and the family

PRESENTERS: Mark Rivett, Stacey McDonald

Young people’s sexual activity on the Net is challenging family therapists’ ideas that the family is the most significant crucible of development. Increasingly, young people are learning about sexuality and relationships from exposure to pornography and to ‘playful’ (a debatable word) activities such as sexting. Parents and therapists would prefer to ignore this development and regard it as aberrant rather than mainstream. They often view internet sexual activity through the lens of feminism which offers many insights but may limit our therapeutic curiosity. The way this aspect of the social media experience of young people is infringing on family life, beliefs and expectations raises issues about sexuality, privacy and secrecy. It evokes personal responses in which a balance is constantly sought between ‘Victorian’ morals and a more contemporary respect for the role of sexuality in human relationships. This workshop will invite participants to consider their own position on these issues.

The presenters work in a service that helps young people who have engaged in harmful sexual activity with a particular focus on Harmful Internet Sexual Behaviour. We will use case examples and exercises to demonstrate that family therapy skills are applicable to this area of work even though the pressure from outside of the family is strong.
How will this workshop be irreverent? We ask participants to be willing to be irreverent to their own ideas about sexuality: straight, gay, bisexual or transgender ideas. We also ask participants to be willing to be challenged by irreverence to their sacred models themselves. Be irreverent even to irreverence! There will be a large interactive (and probably heated) element to the workshop.

4. Title: “The UK Team of Life Resilience Programme: A taster session (football boots optional!)”

PRESENTERS: Vicky Eames & Mariangels Ferrer Duch

This aim of the workshop is to describe the Team of Life methodology, an example of collective narrative practice, and to introduce participants to the new Team of Life resilience programme developed on behalf of Cheshire & Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (Eames & Denborough, 2014).

The Team of Life methodology has been employed within a diverse range of communities internationally including Rwanda, Aboriginal Australia, Palestine, Uganda and Zimbabwe. Collective narrative practice methodologies such as the Team of Life build upon the everyday, ordinary rituals and joys of community life. Young people’s connections to nature, sports, stories, songs and histories can be the starting point for conversations. Significantly, collective narrative practice methodologies do not require young people to speak in the first person about their lives and they emphasise the skills, abilities, hopes and dreams of participants. This ensures that these approaches do not ‘re-traumatise’ young people. Instead, these ways of working create contexts for pride, the acknowledgement of ‘hard-won’ knowledge, and the celebration of ‘goals’ that young people have already scored in life.

The success of pilot groups on The Wirral has led to the development of a manualised Team of Life resilience programme. The development work underpinning the Team of Life resilience programme has been undertaken with the involvement of teams of young people. The World Class Team from The Mosslands School in Wallasey were the first Wirral Team of Life group and were the inspiration behind the project. REAL Royalty were another mainstream school team who say they stand for Respect, Effort, Action and Loyalty. Team 7 UP are a group of CAMHS service users who say they want to ‘move up’ in their lives and continue to support the ongoing work of the project. The resulting ‘Team of Life Kitbag’ is a toolkit and manual containing session plans, facilitator’s guidance, PowerPoint delivery support and printable resources. It is hoped the kit will facilitate wider use of the Team of Life within educational, clinical and community settings.

In the workshop Mariangels Ferrer Duch will introduce narrative therapy ideas by sharing a box of objects that reflect her journey with narrative approaches. She considers this visual way of teaching theory and practice, connecting with her own story to be an act of irreverence and somehow resistance to institutionalised, normalised and ‘academic’ approaches. Vicky Eames will give an overview of collective narrative therapy approaches and the development work underpinning the Team of Life resilience programme. The audience will then have an opportunity to experience some Team of Life activities. It is hoped that there will also be opportunities to discuss some of the issues raised for narrative practitioners engaging in conventional applied research approaches such as the development of manualised programmes. Is it possible to undertake such work while adhering to the principles underlying narrative practice?

Vicky Eames is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist working in Wirral CAMHS Adcote Health & Education Service. Mariangels Ferrer-Duch is a Clinical Psychologist, Family Therapist and Supervisor working independently.
5. Title: Intersectionality and The Graces : Systemic Tools for working with Sexuality and Gender.

PRESENTERS: Amanda Middleton

This workshop seeks to explore how existing theories and tools for working with individual difference both enable and constrain systemic theory and practice in relation to sexual and gender diversity. Conceptualisation of difference is considered, together with the theoretical and practice models that have emerged to respond to difference and diversity within systemic therapy. The Social Graces model and the concept of intersectionality, as it is applied to systemic therapy, are considered in relation to working with issues of gender and sexual diversity. This workshop will seek to be irreverent to the Social Graces, proposing that although both the Social Graces and intersectionality are useful, intersectionality as both a theoretical and practice approach provides a richer framework for working effectively with sexual and gender diversity.

The workshop will address specifically how therapeutic practices related to intersectional theory allow for greater scope to address power, explore and understand shifting identity and honour unique and complex lives and relationships. It is proposed that an approach that embraces intersectionality allows for a systemic therapy practice that is more in line with postmodern ideas of robust practitioner reflexivity, and shows greater respect to the multi-faceted nature of queer sexualities and genders.

The workshop will provide a theoretical backdrop for the audience to think into and apply to their own practice. Also, there will be specific invitations to personal/professional reflexivity and to becoming a little irreverent to the Social Graces through the use of participatory exercises.

6. Title: These boots were made for...... A Systemic Art Workshop

PRESENTERS: Elaine Holliday

This is an invitation to make a shoe using art materials and to be part of a systemic art workshop where participants can generate stories and conversations in response to whatever arises - from the starting point of a creative task.

The idea for this workshop came in direct response to the conference information and the reference to shoes as a way to think about diversity, range and fit - and how our different styles as therapists are influenced. The workshop offers a visual and creative way to explore and attend to diversity and equality within a systemic framework. The workshop also promotes the contribution that irreverence and humour can bring to therapeutic work.

A wide range of art and craft materials will be available: Clay, felt and sewing equipment, balsa, paint, cardboard, modroc, strings, wires and ribbons (and more). The workshop will give time to introducing materials and warming the context. If you know in advance you would like to take part you might want to bring some extra bits and pieces with you. With this in mind you can draw freely on your imagination.

There is a fee of £5 for this workshop (towards the cost of art materials).

About the presenter: I am a systemic family psychotherapist, art therapist and artist working in Kent and London. My main area of work is within fostering and adoption and I often use art making with families as a way of expanding their communication together. It is part of my systemic tool kit. This art making is developed in collaboration with families and is different every time. As a family therapist I promote the place for illustration within systemic approaches. Illustrations create narratives and narratives inspire illustrations, each can enrich the other and bring new meanings and change. I enjoy
‘drawing on theory’ and have used art making to reflect on systemic theories. I also use these illustrations as teaching tools. I have created front covers and illustrations for Context and for academic books and papers.

7. Title: An unholy marriage? A systemic/psychodynamic approach to consultancy

PRESENTERS: Sandy Bryson, Independent Organisational Consultant, Psychodynamic and Systemic Psychotherapist.

In order to survive, every therapeutic modality must define and defend its own ‘unique’ model of change, methods and approaches. The history and development of Family Therapy is no exception to this. As we embrace our chosen modality, there is often the risk of ‘throwing out the baby with the bathwater’, as we rush to assimilate the latest ideas or practices whilst discarding older theoretical ideas or clinical approaches which may have something very valuable to offer. In this workshop, I will be looking at how ideas and concepts from the psychoanalytic tradition can be used alongside systemic ideas when consulting to teams and organisations. Participants will be encouraged to debate and apply these ideas to their own work contexts and experience. In keeping with the theme of the conference, this workshop aims to help participants “borrow, learn, build on and continue to grow from what has gone before.”

When we incorporate another theoretical model, we open ourselves to the opportunity of a new perspective which is greater than the sum of the parts. Whether the systemic/psychoanalytic approach to consultancy is a marriage which allows for the birth of new ways of working, or a temporary cohabiting arrangement I will leave to the judgement of the participants!

8. Title: Jumping into the unknown: Research as a survival strategy

PRESENTERS: Lisa Rudgley, Nicola Church, Family and Systemic Psychotherapists CAMHS

Our workshop aims to track our research journeys from a position of curiosity and not knowing to one in which we have collected data about our chosen topics and have research findings which give voice to the ‘less heard’ narratives of young adults and clinicians in relation to the topic areas.

We hope to describe our process of starting out on our research journeys which were undertaken as part of our MSc and Doctoral training courses. We hope to share our experience of the freedom that being on a course with a research focus allowed us.

Our individual research topics arose from significant moments from within our own areas of clinical practice. This reflective process highlighted particular themes which stimulated our curiosity and which we felt might benefit from further in depth exploration.

Unexpectedly our research studies not only provided an opportunity to develop research skills but also expanded our theoretical knowledge and clinical skills. We feel this process helped us maintain our enthusiasm and creativity whilst contributing to our personal development within a changing NHS context.

Research questions were developed and ethical approval gained. We hope to present our research journeys, highlighting the process, methodologies and findings.

a) What stories do CAMHS professionals have about what connects them to their work?
Nicola Church
The purpose of the research was to hear stories of CAMHS professionals’ connections to their work. A Systemic Social Constructionist framework was used. This was a qualitative research
project incorporating four semi-structured interviews of CAMHS clinicians. Narrative Analysis was used to analyse collected data. The results from analysis of collected data highlighted themes which illuminated positive descriptions of why people chose to work in CAMHS.

b) Left high and Dry: Healthcare transition experiences of young adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Lisa Rudgley
This study aimed to examine the healthcare transition experiences of young adults with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder leading up to and following their discharge from Child and Adolescent Mental Health services at age 18 and to elicit their views about what services they would find helpful in the future. A qualitative approach was used and data analysed using: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Four superordinate themes were identified: personal experience of ADHD diagnosis and treatment; impact on self and relationships; living with ADHD and moving on.

9. Title: Maintaining Ethical practice under pressure: Can NHS provision of family therapy be ethical?
PRESENTERS: AFT ETHICS COMMITTEE (Anni Hilton, Cherrith Marshall, Barbara Warner) AND DAVID STEARE
Members of the Ethics Committee will present an overview of some of the difficulties experienced by members who have found their practice challenged by pressures from employers and clients. David Steare will irreverently question whether ethical practice is possible within the NHS and other statutory/and funded organisations. Small groups will then be guided in their conversations to take an appreciative inquiry into existing ethical practice. Following the break David will present the ‘Ethicability’ framework developed for the corporate sector before Ethics Committee members lead a reflection on the Code of Ethics and how this can be used in structuring therapy and the workplace. The workshop will conclude with an open discussion designed to elicit current possibilities.

10. Title: Child IAPT and Systemic Family Practice – Irreverence, Ambivalence and Perseverance in an Evidenced Based Culture. Where are we now, nine months on?
PRESENTERS: Hannah Sherbersky, Jeanette Neden, Jackqui Sayers, Judith Lask, Grace Heaphy & Tom O'Neill
This year has seen the start of the Child IAPT training in Systemic Family Practice (SFP) in five higher education institutes across the UK. Thanks to the incredible commitment of systemic academics and practitioners, we find systemic family practice now well represented within the IAPT system (Singh, 2014) and systemic practice and training could be described as entering a new era. This workshop, delivered by Hannah Sherbersky, Jeanette Neden and Jacqui Sayers representing the Universities of Exeter, Northumbria and Reading respectively, presents an overview of the pioneering work in academic training and service transformation that have involved allied CAMHS clinicians and many family therapists working in local collaboratives across the country. The workshop includes feedback from existing trainees, CYP IAPT Systemic Family Practice supervisors and young people within the service; about some of their experiences of the training.
CYP IAPT aims to:
•improve access to CAMHS, and the partnership with children, young people, families, professional and agencies
•build capability to deliver positive and measurable outcomes for children, young people and families
•increase the choice of evidence based treatments available.
The training in Systemic Family Practice represents one domain of the overall service transformation project and a huge financial investment by the DoH. But as academics and clinicians, how do we position ourselves in a way that Cecchin describes as “both ethical and therapeutic”? We respond with his proposal to maintain a “continuous conversation with colleagues”. We ask ourselves, how can we ensure we attend to issues of diversity and equanimity across many different complex service provisions? How do we keep creativity and curiosity alive within the context of a rigorous and demanding curriculum, the demands of limited or diminishing resources and extremely tight timescales?

Come and join a lively discussion, facilitated by Judith Lask who has worked extensively on the AFT CYP IAPT Curriculum Board, and explore the potentials and constraints of CYP IAPT for CAMHS and for the future of the family therapy profession. Consider the evidence about impact which existing systemic provision for eating disorders, conduct disorder, self-harm and depression has had as a result of CYP IAPT. Many family therapists working in CAMHS have and will be influenced by CYP IAPT, and we invite a context of sharing your curiosities and experiences; gentle irreverence, ambivalence and a sense of humour are all welcome.


11. Title: “…Love, Irreverence.' - An Externalized Letter Writing Workshop”

PRESENTERS: Steve Harrison

ABSTRACT
This workshop is about exploring possibilities in practice.

Questions to be considered include, what are the revered influences on our style of working? Which ideas do we treasure and how do they shape our repertoire? Who are our revered colleagues and how is their presence felt in our consulting rooms and beyond? What would happen if we loosened our connections to these trusted approaches, methods & techniques? What differences would we notice? If we acted and interacted more irreverently what new possibilities may emerge to surprise us?

What changes might we experiment with today and how might we nurture these over time?

In the workshop participants will be invited to write a letter, to map out how they would like to bring irreverence into their therapeutic repertoire. Participants will begin this documentary process to see if the ideas developed in the workshop can be taken forward in a meaningful way over time.

SATURDAY 20TH SEPTEMBER

11.30 – 1.00PM You may attend one of the 10 fringe workshops and activities

1. TITLE: Lear’s Fool: Licence to be irreverent as comedian and shamanic healer

PRESENTERS: John Hill, Brian Cade and Ged Smith
In Shakespeare’s “King Lear”, the role of the Fool is to tease, amuse, and criticise a slowly dementing King beset by aging and all manner of family relational difficulties.

‘Playing the Fool’ is an essential and functional social role in all relationships. However, the licence to be outrageous and say things that are heretical or irreverent, has to be held within a carefully maintained boundary. Such licensed irreverence is the hallmark of every comedian and also every psychotherapist - the modern day equivalent of the shamanic healer.

No truth or taboo is off-limits to the ‘Fool’, although, keeping the balance between offensiveness to others and destructiveness to self (Lear could have his ‘Fool’ killed at any moment) is a challenge of timing, use of language and fine judgement in the ‘use of self’ in relationship.

Since life itself is full of absurdities and fundamentally irrational all ‘Fools’ are in touch with some deeper lying truths that are essential to both the feeding of and feeling of, well being. The ‘Fool’, like the therapist, often dances on the edge.

Aware of the setting of this workshop in a city renowned for its wit, cultural resilience and social genius (and we don’t just mean those Liverpool icons the ‘Diddymen’), the Presenters will use many examples of ‘The Fool’ in action. Quite which, will have to wait for the day, but we would expect contributions from amongst others: Siggy F, The Marxists Brothers (without their serious brother Karl), Ken Dodd, Bob Newhart, Sandi Toksvig, Richard Pryor, Linda Smith John Bishop and Russell Brand. The leading systemic psychotherapy practitioners as ‘Fool’ will include Carl Whitaker, Jay Haley, John Weakland, and Milton Erickson – or on the other hand they may not. You will be introduced to Mikhail Bakhtin’s ‘Carnival’ and the therapeutic value of laughter in reducing power and the work of hypocrisy.

The presenters will give demonstrations from their own case ‘tom-foolery’ to demonstrate the risk taking involved in such ‘high wire’ acts and the benefits if executed successfully (and the risks of ‘managerial execution’ or ‘patient execution’ if unsuccessful). Some guidance how you could build your own portable safety net (should you feel you want one) will be demonstrated from one we made earlier.

There may be a special guest visitation from the ‘Wizard of Oz’ but again this will not be known until the day.

Examples of your therapeutic ‘tom-foolery’ will be welcome along with any disastrous ‘prat falls’ for a feast of learning, laughter and social interest.

As the traditional African healer and actor Damoure Zika from Niger put it once “when you make a patient laugh you are already halfway towards a cure”. The ‘Fool’ knows no cultural boundaries!

The ‘Fool’ and the ‘Shaman’ in dialogue aka “Families and How to Survive them” John Cleese and Robin Skynner (Cedar Books) (1983)

2. TITLE: Playing with toys and words in Therapeutic Child Care

PRESENTERS: Michelle Newman Brown and Lesley Hanney

In this interactive workshop we would like to provide the space to explore and discuss the levels of irreverence different people feel confident to work within, if we re-name it as ‘Creative Therapeutic Practice’!

We will discuss what influences the context of our work (and play) and consider how our own personal and professional beliefs can enable or disable our creative approaches to reach their potential!
There will be some examples of our creative therapy with some highly complex and traumatised young people in the Care System and young people struggling with Anorexia Nervosa. These may include case scenarios such as:

1. How much ketchup can be used when it falls from the overfilled cupboard of anger?
2. Emotional Marbles Game.
3. The Determinator Puppy Werewolf.
4. Violin lesson therapy.
5. Bars of chocolate of trust.
6. When the venomous spider bite has a ‘drip, drip antidote’.

There will be opportunities to explore your own relationship to irreverence through a creative art process, as well as an opportunity to play with toys or objects and talk about the playfulness of words. We hope that people will leave the workshop exhilarated and stimulated by the shared experience of the effects of creativity in our practice.

**Michelle** is a Consultant Systemic Psychotherapist and a member of Aspens. She is a lecturer for the Tavistock Diploma in Systemic Theory Course based in Kent. Michelle has been committed to work within Therapeutic Residential Care for over 20 years, beginning as a Residential Social Worker at The Caldecott. She has experienced the complexities that trauma and abuse can have on young children and has developed Systemic Therapy, Training, Staff Consultation and Supervision for a number of Foster Agencies and Therapeutic Care Homes throughout the South East. Her work within the Canterbury Domestic Violence Project and NHS CAMHS has also contributed to the development of her self-employed work. Michelle’s therapy includes on going individual, couple and family therapy and reports for Local Authorities. Where possible, when working with young people, she makes use of play as a helpful means of engagement and communication.

**Lesley** is a Consultant Systemic Psychotherapist, Systemic Supervisor and an Art Psychotherapist. She has a specialist interest in working creatively with attachment and trauma and has published several articles in this area. Lesley has over 25 years of experience in Children and Young People’s Mental Health services. She has specialised in working with adopted children and young people and their families. She works with foster carers, adopters and birth families, particularly in the area of establishing placement stability, creating positive contact experiences and providing assessments and consultation to the networks around them. She has also set up a care pathway for Eating Disorders across Kent and for the past five years facilitated Multi Family Therapy groups for young people with Anorexia Nervosa using creative processes. Lesley’s work has also included the provision of assessments for the family court where there are concerns from local authorities on the most appropriate placement and therapeutic provision.

3. **TITLE:** Making it up as you go along: With thanks to Lynn Hoffman (It’s all her fault!)

**PRESENTERS:** Gary Robinson

**ABSTRACT**
I once spent a weekend with Lynn Hoffman (Along with many other people, it wasn’t a date!). Over a glass of wine or two she shared and inspired a couple of important thoughts about being a Family Therapist, including:

1. It’s ok to be yourself and to share aspects of yourself with families that we work with
2. It’s ok to have fun and to laugh and to cry with people that we support
3. It’s ok to take risks and play seriously with families that we meet
4. Sometimes we just make it up as we go along

I have been doing all of this and more ever since and would like to share stories of irreverence, mishaps, triumphs, surprises, embarrassments, gaffs and gold.

The workshop will include a World Record attempt by a qualified Family Therapist aiming to facilitate and talk for over an hour without quoting or referencing any theory or research. All complex language and jargon will be left outside the room to make space for participants to bring, share and develop their creativity in safety. Come and share tears and laughter, music, film and stories. A ‘Top Twelve Tips’ will be shared on how to be an irreverent systemic practitioner and keep a job. We can make the rest up as we go along.

4. TITLE: "Carry that weight: existence, knowledge and irreverence"

PRESENTERS: Maria Nichterlein

ABSTRACT
This workshop attempts to address a reflexive and perhaps paradoxical question that emerges out of the theme of the conference: are there theories that are ‘better than others’ in honouring both our commitment to systemic thinking and the spirit of irreverence that informs this conference? Are there theories that ‘are better than others’ in addressing and honouring the experience of us as therapists (who embrace systemic ideas) when, engaged in the daily clinical practice, we struggle with aspects of the theories that, although defining our field, ‘feel’ dissonant to what ‘feels’ right and appropriate to clinical practices (even when we are not clear as to what right/appropriate is in itself?)

These are questions that seem central to the type of philosophy that have become known as “post-structuralism,” “philosophy of difference” or “French thought” (ironically leaving out of such name a large number of remarkable French thinkers including, Descartes, Voltaire, Sartre, Camus, Merleau-Ponti, Bergson, to name just a few). If these ideas are to be briefly defined, they would necessarily make reference to their intimate connection with the general discontent with the state of affairs that lead to the events of May’68 in Paris and the counterculture movement in general that swept that Western world in the 60s and 70s. Philosophers of this generation had to make sense of these events, bringing with this a widespread critique of traditional modes of thought. They were the rebels – the ‘new blood’ – and they took great energy by not taking for granted much of what was considered ‘obvious’ and was taken for dogma. In many ways they “paved the way” for what was later known as postmodernism, even when many of these thinkers would not identify with such a label and, on the contrary, would have significant problems with it.

One of these philosophers is Gilles Deleuze. There is much in the philosophy of difference of Gilles Deleuze that speaks to this reflexive question. A critique of notions of identity and representation, Deleuze’s work consistently and coherently critiqued the ‘repressive’ role that the history of philosophy played in thought and in the attempts of philosophers to think openly and in an engaged way with the world. Furthermore, and in a gesture that differentiates him from other so called post-structural thinkers (e.g. Foucault and Derrida), Deleuze in conjunction with the anti-psychiatrist Guattari, put forward a whole alternative conception of life and knowledge based on difference and desire – rather than transcendental truth.

Interestingly enough, there is much commonality between Deleuze’s work and Bateson’s project of developing a (systemic) way of thinking that would honour our sacred connection with the world and an ecology of ideas; a way of thinking that moves away from reifications (of things and theories) and looks instead into the health of this earth and how it is constantly injured due to human desires to control it and feel master of it.

The workshop will discuss both Batesonian and Deleuzian ideas, (hopefully) in an informal and engaging way, so as to identify how irreverence towards ‘what every schoolboy knows...’ (one of Bateson’s favourite dictums) is not only ok but also necessary for the survival of both ourselves
and this earth. Such irreverence is then understood as a deeper kind of reverence to what is sacred in life: the sustainability of graceful forms of existence. In this context, more than techniques and ready-made formulas of what works in the clinic, it is the careful nurturance of one’s (as well as others’) grace/singularity that is central to therapeutic and healing work.

The workshop will be structured around an initial presentation (1 hour) and then will open to a dialogue where (hopefully) questions from the audience will further interrogate and/or explore the concepts and ideas introduced. A vignette will be presented as a way to put to work the ideas explored.

The workshop is meant to be inclusive and, rather than being an advanced forum, it is oriented to those who is interested in conceptual/theoretical issues yet struggle to make sense of these type of ideas in the actual clinical work. The ideas discussed are further considerations from the research I did for my PhD.

In order to facilitate this spirit for the workshop, it is desirable that people interested enrol early so that I could send some material for participants to read in preparation.

5. TITLE: ROUGHLECTIVE PRACTICE: Evaluation some rough gems of theory and practice

PRESENTERS: Nick Child

ABSTRACT
This interactive, friendly, but less polished, introductory workshop fits the conference themes well. Reflective practice is being thoughtful about what we do. We all do that. But reflection has an extra polished meaning for us in family therapy. Roughlective practice is a pun to evoke the polished <-> rough dimension and centre us better on it. It gives British family therapy's social constructionist phase all credit due, but demotes it from scary head master to trusty servant, a useful therapeutic tool along with other tools in our kit. With their rough edges knocked off, rough gems may be found useful, if not sparkling and valuable. Rejecting rough diamonds is a valid option too.

Roughlective practice means we hold onto the safe base of systemic reflective practice, but liberate more creative or daring ways in working with clients as well as in extending our field. This means securer teaming up with our clients. It means getting ready for the opportunities and risks of more directive, structural or strategic ways than we may be used to in the UK. This is particularly relevant for us as we raise our profile in the non-statutory sector. That is where Nick has been mining these rough gems recently.

Participants will be invited to try out a way of thinking that encourages us more to pick up and welcome our more daring ideas and options with our clients. Participants may expect their confidence and skill to double just by finding new permission and safety.

We will only have time to sketch out a wide range of bigger topics for the field. These also require more than pure reflective practice. Hand outs will help answer questions and extend the learning afterwards from this introductory workshop.

6. TITLE: Victims rule! OK?

PRESENTERS: Chris Burroughs

Not the latest therapeutic model.

Not a famous academic his excellent and unique findings.

Not an expert with the answers to one of your practice “issues”.

Just a fellow traveller in a joint exploration of how each of us might live well, ethically, systemically and irreverently - and survive in a world of power and oppression.

Chris is a member of the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Committee of AFT, and wants to promote irreverence, minimise solemnity and play with “political correctness”. He proposes a shared opportunity to develop personal repertoires for enjoying solidarity and difference.

Participants will be invited to offer their own experiences, jokes & stories of resilience, as possible strategies for others to employ.

7. TITLE: Couples behaving badly? An exploration of developments in couple relationships
PRESENTERS: Damian McCann

The presentation of couple’s in therapy over recent years has begun to challenge the basis of mainstream traditional couple relationships.

This workshop will explore the meaning and management of open relationships, polyamory and other non-traditional forms of relating in clinical practice.

What can systemic therapy offer practitioners grappling with the creative and sometimes painful ways in which couples construct and live out their relationships?

Exploring the impact of developments in relating on couples and therapists will provide the primary focus for this workshop.

8. TITLE: DISsing the social GGRRAAACCEEESSS
PRESENTERS: Victoria Jones and Donna Reeve

The “Social GGRRAAACCEEESSS” developed by John Burnham and Alison Roper-Hall (Burnham 1992, 1993, 2011, Roper-Hall 1998, 2008) highlight the social factors that can influence both practitioners and clients. In this mnemonic disability and impairment effects are represented by ‘ability’.

Drawing on the field of Disability Studies and the social construction of disability this workshop will facilitate an exploration of the consequences of the omission of the ‘dis’ of disability. It will be proposed that ‘ability’ serves to deny the psycho-emotional dimensions of both disability and impairment effects that can influence the way disability, identities and roles are constructed by disabled and non-disabled therapists and clients.

Participants will apply the visible-invisible and voiced-unvoiced framework (Burnham, 2012), to disability and impairment and be invited to join a conversation exploring the utility of these ideas in practice and training.

Diversity – Social Graces and Disability

Irreverence – proposes the ‘Social Dis-graces’ that potentially turns the idea of ‘Social Graces’ on its head – how might this impact on how the other Graces are conceived and on our practice, training and CPD?
9. TITLE: The Neutral Mask

PRESENTERS: Mark Huhnen

The Neutral Mask is used in (physical) theatre training to develop a state of physical readiness and availability. Neutrality here was understood as a blank canvas on which the character can be painted.

The Neutral Mask has no history and no memory, it is only curious, playful and therefore irreverent. Since the last revision of the concept by G. Cecchin is now a while ago, is it worth revising Neutrality again? Is it worth questioning the established ‘truth’ about Neutrality and the connected concepts of Curiosity and Irreverence? What might we find if we approach Neutrality with our bodies and not with our minds?

In this workshop we will use Neutral Masks to physically explore Neutrality in a series of exercises.

Please bring lose fitting and ‘neutral’ clothes, in which you are comfortably moving.

10. TITLE: Challenging the medical diagnosis: irreverence, irrelevance or malevolence?

PRESENTERS: Christopher Ward

The purpose of this workshop is to exchange ideas about the relationships that family therapists choose to have with medical labels. The literature bristles with hostility towards the oppressive effects of the medical model. Therapists who see no conflict between medical and systemic points of view could be seen as contributing to oppression, and they do nothing to help their clients resist the negative effects of diagnostic labels. On the other hand, outright hostility to the idea of diagnosis is unhelpful in a world where medical categories are unavoidable, even if it produces narratives that are valuable in therapy. A third attitude among family therapists is ambivalence - a love-hate relationship with diagnosis - but ambivalence is no better than collusion as a means of empowering families to access their own resources for change. In this workshop we will be pursuing a ‘both/and’ approach that is coherent, but at the same time workable for families and for therapists in the everyday world.

The ‘both/and’ position that life outside therapy requires is not easy to articulate. At its heart, the question of diagnosis meets a key concept of systemic practice, externalization. By separating the problem from the person, diagnosis and externalization generate particular ‘ways of knowing’ the self and others. Therapists need to share with their clients, sufficient coherence in talking about diagnosis or about externalization generally to avoid what Linares (2001) calls a ‘double epistemology’. Unless they do so their concepts of diagnosis risk separating themselves, as well as their clients, from responsibility as well as from blame.

I am a family therapist and systemic practitioner, a retired physician (rather than a psychiatrist), and also someone with personal and family experiences of diagnosis. Diagnosis is something I have given, received, lived with, worked with, and sometimes despaired of. I see diagnosis in a very general way, as a naming of distress rather than solely as a medical classification. The oppressive potential, and any creative possibilities, of such names are not monopolised by doctors but involve everyone. In this workshop, therefore, the question of diagnosis will be framed with less attention to the boundaries between physical and mental ideas about illness, or between doctors and others, than to the responsibilities that therapists share with their professional colleagues and their clients.

In the workshop participants will experiment with perspectives that aim to:
• gauge the distance between therapeutic and everyday ideas about diagnosis
• explore the relational implications of either naming or not naming problems
• foster an irreverent, emancipatory stance towards diagnosis
• think again about externalization as a therapeutic and family practice
• draw attention to the responsibilities of others besides doctors in issues of power and oppression
• generate (if we can) a coherent ‘both/and’ concept of diagnosis for use in family therapy


2.00 – 3.30 pm – choose one of 5 workshops

1. TITLE: 'Is (ir)reverence for me?' Creating a reflexive relationship between reverence and irreverence.

PRESENTERS: John Burnham and Sharon Bond

Each of us performs acts of reverence and irreverence in both our personal and professional lives. This may be in thought or deed. Sharon and John will explore the particular relationship each practitioner has with (ir)reverence and aim to extend (ir)reverence as a resource in practice. We will be addressing questions such as:

How can we:
• Include both reverence and irreverence in our practice?
• Develop a reflexive relationship between the two postures?
• Which systemic concepts/frameworks/practices help us to achieve this?

If a reflexive relationship is created then we may avoid either reverence or irreverence becoming a restraint to creative practice and increase the chances of each being a reflexive resource.

The workshop will reverently include some tell and show as well as invitations to be irreverent to your usual ways of thinking and practicing.

2. TITLE: From Irreverence to Respect? Or Respectful Irreverence?: Issues for Clinicians and Supervisors

PRESENTERS: Barry Mason

What do we mean in clinical and supervisory practice when we say we practice respectfully, particularly in relation to elements of the Social GGRAACEESS (Burnham, 2012)? When does the notion of respect border on becoming an unhelpful mantra in clinical and supervisory practice?

Are we putting ‘being respectful’ in opposition to irreverence rather than taking a position of respectful irreverence? How do our own personal beliefs as therapists and supervisors aid/constrain us in our work in addressing beliefs that we do not respect.

The presenter will:
• Highlight examples from his practice, particularly in relation to religion, culture and gender.
• Talk about how his own family of origin and cultural scripts influence his professional task in these areas of practice.
• Give a short exercise; and
• Open the presentation up for discussion and debate.

3. TITLE: What is a Couple? Irreverence and Creativity when working with transnational couples and families
PRESENTER: Reenee Singh

How is couple-ness defined in different cultures? How do we, as therapists, work with couples that draw on ideas of couple-ness that may be very different from ours? How do these ideas influence our work with families and wider systems of concern?

This interactive workshop will help to deconstruct our own ideas about couple-ness. Through presenting clinical vignettes, findings from qualitative research and the media, it will explore and offer a range of creative ideas when working with transnational and diverse couple and family forms.

Reenee Singh is a Consultant Systemic Psychotherapist, the Child and Family Practice, Independent Trainer and Researcher, Editor – Journal of Family Therapy.

4. TITLE: Julie Fallon (Hillsborough Families Support Group & Counsellor) in conversation with Danny McGowan (Family Therapist)

Julie is a member of The Hillsborough Families Support Group, which was founded in May 1989 by a majority of the families who lost loved ones at Hillsborough football stadium on 15th April 1989. The bereaved families came together to support each other and to campaign to bring out the truth and ensure justice was achieved. Their campaign is a unique part of Liverpool's history, and has a wider relevance too.

Julie is also a counsellor and knows Danny through their shared work with young people and families.

This workshop aims to share her experiences and reflections of the families campaign, the support they provided and received and the legacy of the disaster and the long campaign for justice. The format will be a conversation with an invitation for attendees to share their own thoughts, reflections and questions.

5. TITLE: TO BE CONFIRMED
PRESENTER: Amanda Jones, Consultant Perinatal Psychotherapist and Head of North East London NHS Foundation Trust, tier 3 perinatal parent infant mental health service and Honorary Associate Professor Warwick Medical School.