

# AFT Bristol Symposium

## 01 May 2020



### Issues to consider when working with LGBT couples

**Time:** Session 1 – 14:00 to 15:15

**Presenter(s):** Catherine Butler, Systemic Therapist and Clinical Psychologist  
Nicola Gunby, Intermediate Systemic Trainee and Trainee Clinical Psychologist

#### Abstract

Like many couples, LGBT couples may seek support from mental services, sometimes bringing sexuality or gender specific concerns, sometimes unrelated issues. However, it is argued that regardless of what issues they bring, couple therapists should still be aware and mindful of the impact a sexual and gender minority status upon clients and those around them (Giammattei & Green, 2012). E.g. LGBT couples may face discrimination and prejudice from others and this has been linked to poorer relationship quality (Gamarel, et al., 2014).

Therapists typically have little training on gender and sexual diversity (Lev, 2004), and some LGBT individual therapy clients have reported feeling misunderstood by their therapists (Benson, 2013). Other research has suggested that therapists can be less comfortable discussing some aspects of relationships with gender or sexual minority clients, particularly sex and intimacy (Rutter, et al., 2010). Sexual and gender minority therapy (SGMT) is a broad stance to working therapeutically with clients with seeks to respect and consider the experiences of LGBT individuals (Butler, 2009). SGMT works particularly well within a systemic framework because of the explicit attention to power and the Social GRACES. Principles of SGMT include acknowledging one's own identity and beliefs around gender and sexuality, challenging assumptions regarding sexual and gender minority experiences, and holding respect for individual lifestyles (Davies, 1996). SGMT has been linked to greater therapeutic alliance between therapists and client, and greater satisfaction with therapy (Sheerin, 2009).

This workshop will provide guidelines for working with LGBT individuals within systemic practice within an SGMT framework. It includes overviews of particular issues LGBT couples might bring to therapy, such members of the couple holding different comfort levels with being 'out', as well as an invitation to reflect on the unspoken taken-for-granted assumptions our own gender and sexual identities can hold.

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### The Imago Dialogue – a gift you can give to any dyad you’re working with

**Time:** Session 1 - 14:00 to 15:15

**Presenter(s):** Angela Markham, Systemic Family Psychotherapist in private practice

#### Abstract

I will introduce you to the 3 steps of the Dialogue, mirroring, validation and empathy, and demonstrate with volunteers. You will have a crib sheet to take away with you. Imago Therapy is designed to help conflict within relationships become opportunities for healing and growth. In the Dialogue there is a sender and a receiver and the therapist deepens the “send” by offering the sender sentence stems. There is a Zero Negativity rule, so no naming (eg. you’re selfish), no blaming (eg, you made me../it’s your fault that...) and no shaming. So, clients are coached to turn, “you’re so selfish, you’re home late again..” to something like “when you’re late home I feel ... and I make up a story that... and what it reminds me of from my childhood is...” Clients move from blame and reactivity to understanding and empathy so they can create a deeper and more loving connection with each other. I recently used this with a 12yr old and her mother. It can be used in all relationships.

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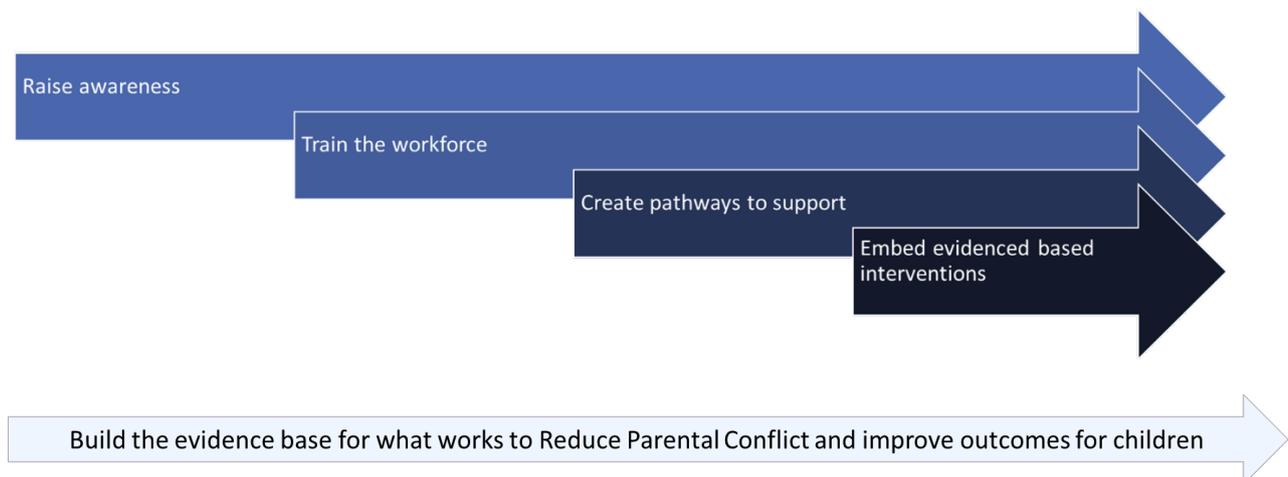
### What works to reduce parental conflict – early findings from the Reducing Parental Conflict (RPC) programme

**Time:** Session 1 - 14:00 to 15:15

**Presenter(s):** Emily Ingle, Regional Integration Lead – Reducing Parental Conflict

#### Abstract

The £39m investment to the RPC programme aims to:



I will share key insights and latest data from the digital findings (we have carried out user research with mothers and fathers from low-income families), EIF's Engaging with Disadvantaged Families findings as well as anecdotes from the Contract Package Area face to face provision from all 4 geographies and the Innovation and Challenge Funds.

#### Face to Face support

One third of the budget is being used to deliver support to disadvantaged families in 30 local authorities across England, testing 8 evidence based couple conflict interventions which have shown promise when used elsewhere. The aim is to build the UK evidence base for which interventions work when reducing parental conflict.

#### Encouraging Wider Innovation

We are also funding further innovation to address parental conflict:

- Working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care and Public Health England to deliver a joint £6m package of support aimed at improving the outcomes of children of alcohol-dependent parents
- Encouraging the use of new approaches to address parental conflict, £2.7m investment in the Challenge Fund, provides grant funding to 10 innovative projects to gather learning on what works to reduce parental conflict digitally, and for families where the children face other disadvantages.

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### Working with couples where suicide or self harm is a possibility

**Time:** Session 1 - 14:00 to 15:15

**Presenter(s):** Imogen Harries, Family Therapist  
Gareth Tanner, Family Therapist

#### Abstract

The workshop will look at working with couples where for one member suicide or self harm is a possibility. The session will focus on the following:

- How the possibility of suicide or self harm organises a relationship; the uncertainty of behaviour.
- The role of trust; how to feel trust and to trust.
- Talking with couples where the non suicidal member does not feel good enough to support or feels they have failed.
- Acknowledging working with the wider system and where the context for self harm may involve other services.
- How to manage the different levels of risk.
- At what point does the therapist stop being relationship focused and focuses on the risk.
- The workshop focuses on supporting couples to communicate about subjects that they may be fearful of addressing due to the possibility of suicide attempt or self harm. It looks at how couples can communicate effectively and therefore create and sustain connections while acknowledging differences.

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### A couple in transition – the ultimate challenge?

**Time:** Session 2 - 15:45 to 17:00

**Presenter(s):** Ruth Yudkin, Psychotherapist in private practice

#### Abstract

In this workshop, I present a case study of my work with a couple where one partner was transitioning from male to female. I am delighted that the couple themselves, Maddie and Jane, have agreed to be interviewed as part of the workshop.

Over the four years of my work with the couple, Maddie's developing identity demanded that both she and Jane continually reassess their understanding not only of themselves as individuals, but also of their roles in relation to each other and to the multiple systems within they each operated. As they discovered more about what each one of them wanted, and what was possible, they continually faced new versions of the question of how to sustain connection.

Although the transition from Mark to Maddie was an insistent theme, other less dominant stories were a vital part of our work together. Indeed, many other aspects of the couple's life were in flux and threatened their connection with each other. Giving the gender transition its full due, but not losing sight of the meaning and value of other transitions, was a challenge for both couple and therapist.

Questions of identity, difference and transition arise with every couple at some point: whether through becoming parents, facing retirement, or discovering a new passion. Negotiating and renegotiating the expectations of a relationship is at the heart of work with all couples. This workshop explores the connections and differences between the work of the therapist with a gender transitioning couple and couples who face other challenges.

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### Thinking 'couples' in acute psychiatric environments. Introducing a systemic conceptualisation of the couple in training across a range of mental health settings.

**Time:** Session 2 - 15:45 to 17:00

**Presenter(s):** Hannah Sherbersky, Family Therapist, Researcher and Academic Lead

#### Abstract

In this workshop, Hannah shares her teaching and training ideas about holding couples in mind in acute psychiatric settings. Individuals, families and couples who are receiving support within acute psychiatric care are frequently the most disadvantaged in terms of power, discrimination, poverty and also in terms of managing their severe mental health difficulties and the concomitant psychiatric treatments (for example the use of the Mental Health Act). In this workshop, Hannah encourages participants to reflect on the uses and abuses of power in these settings, and how we can support ourselves and our colleagues to foreground 'the couple' in their everyday practice.

Hannah will draw on a number of key relevant innovations of which she is programme lead; the CAMHS inpatient training that she developed and delivered to over 130 clinicians and the on-going family intervention for psychosis course. She will also reference training that has been adopted by perinatal teams across the South West, all of which are funded by NHS England. Hannah will reflect on the adaptations made to the Exeter Model, which she co-authored with Professor Janet Reibstein. This model of couple therapy emerged within a research-based couple clinic at the Mood Disorders Centre, Exeter University, and was developed, manualised and rolled out nationally.

In terms of teaching, bringing innovative systemic thinking into the most challenging psychiatric settings is Hannah's passion. She continues to work as Lead Family Therapist at a regional adolescent in-patient unit and holds a number of posts at the University of Exeter. She regularly presents and trains nationally and is an Associate Editor for the Journal of Family Therapy. Publication topics include the Exeter Model, integrative practice, creative approaches in supervision, religion and family therapy, training in psychosis and inpatient family therapy. Most recently, she contributed to a BBC 3 documentary about family therapy ('I Blame my Parents' broadcast January 2019).

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### Couples work in the context of the NVR approach

**Time:** Session 2 - 15:45 to 17:00

**Presenter(s):** Erica Pavord, Systemic Practitioner  
Sarah Rogers, Systemic Psychotherapist

#### Abstract

This workshop will share the experience of Erica and Sarah working in a community family therapy service and using the NVR approach to support parents and families. When we are working with parents who are struggling to manage their child's difficulties, one of the main barriers is the difference in deeply held beliefs and values about parenting and ways of responding to the difficulties. Inevitably, this creates tension, fuels the child's worries and escalates conflict. We find that the NVR approach both provides a shared focus and enables us to negotiate an exploration around deeply held differences in the couple relationship. The workshop will introduce a number of case studies and allow time for discussion and sharing of how NVR can facilitate couples work.

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### Beyond the dyad: an exploration of non-monogamous relationships and sexual practices, and implications for systemic family practice

**Time:** Session 2 - 15:45 to 17:00

**Presenter(s):** **Claudia Kustner**, Clinical Psychologist, Systemic Psychotherapist and Course Director for Foundation/Intermediate courses - University of Bath  
**Jason Maldonada-Page**, Systemic Psychotherapist, Social Worker and Lecturer in Systemic Practice  
**Caroline Grindrod**, Lead Systemic Psychotherapist Community Eating Disorders Service Somerset

#### Abstract

Swinging, polyamory, open relationships, and relationship anarchy are just a few relationship and sexual practices within non-dyadic intimate relationships, but research and training on the topic in systemic family therapy is sparse and barren. Consensual non-monogamous (CNM) couples and families face numerous social obstacles, with regards to internalized and institutionalised marginalisation, disclosure, personal identity, as well as therapeutic challenges such as marginalisation in treatment and lack of therapist education and knowledge.

In this self-reflexive, experiential workshop we will explore some of these challenges and reflect on heteronormative bias. Through clinical case studies and narrative accounts of CNM relationships and families, we will discuss how relationship styles are an important multicultural consideration for systemic therapists to keep in mind. A discussion of how therapists can assist with the negotiation of non-monogamy and suggestions for ways to create secure therapeutic space for families in open relationships will also be explored.