

Analyse me

John Witney
speaks for himself

What would people be surprised to find out about you? I can play Chopin's 'Prelude in E Minor (Op 28, No 4)' on the piano, and it is the only thing that I can play on the piano.



IREK PODSHUTERSTOCK

What motivated you to become a therapist? In 2002 I spent 28 days in rehab for alcohol addiction. The counsellors and the counselling that I experienced there changed my life. I have now been in recovery for more than 21 years. I subsequently felt a strong urge to give something back and became a volunteer with a charity that supports people facing the challenges of life-limiting conditions. I then did a certificate in counselling skills, and that was the beginning of the journey that I am still on.

Do you have a specialist field of practice? Three years ago, at the age of 55, I discovered that I am autistic. Last year I decided to disclose my diagnosis on my private practice website, and since then I have been receiving enquiries from neurodivergent clients who want to see a neurodivergent counsellor. Now more than three-quarters of my clients are autistic.

How has being a therapist changed you? I used to be a terrible listener, always rehearsing what I was going to say about myself when the other person was speaking, or trying to work out how I could fix their problem. Now I am a lot less terrible at it.

Where do you see yourself in five years' time? I recently launched a new counselling directory specifically for therapists who see

clients online (www.counsellingo.com). In five years' time I hope that I will be supporting a thriving community of online therapists.

What do you find challenging about being a therapist?

I occasionally struggle with strong concordant countertransference reactions. Remembering that what I am feeling might not primarily be 'my stuff' is usually quite helpful, but it doesn't seem to make it any less painful sometimes.

And rewarding? I love meeting other therapists at CPD events.

I am not the most socially confident person, so I always welcome opportunities to engage with people who literally practise having authentic and meaningful relationships.

What is the most recent CPD you've undertaken? Was it worthwhile? I have just started the

Foundation in Mindfulness-based Core Process Psychotherapy at the Karuna Institute in Bristol. The integration of Buddhist principles and psychotherapeutic practice has long been a special interest of mine. I am hoping to start the three-year postgraduate diploma this year.

What book/blog/podcast do you recommend most often?

A book called *The Evolving Self: problem and process in human development* by Robert Kegan - it not

only describes what is going on at various stages of adult development, it also explains why it is happening and, perhaps more importantly, suggests how to navigate the shifts between each stage.

What do you do for self-care/to relax?

I am a member of a Buddhist sangha. A small group of us meet up with our lama (spiritual leader) on Zoom every morning at 7am for an hour of chanting, reciting and meditating. The daily routine and structure plus the regular connection with others have helped me to maintain a consistent meditation practice for many years. I also love ecstatic dancing.

What is the meaning of life?

My life seems to be about waking up to the true nature of reality, and supporting others who are also waking up. If, as the Buddha suggested, suffering is a consequence of our mistaken beliefs about the very nature of our experience, then a life dedicated to uncovering and re-evaluating the assumptions that underpin those beliefs feels like a meaningful one.

Who is your counselling/psychotherapy hero(ine)?

Petrůska Clarkson - I studied *The Therapeutic Relationship* for my counselling degree, and her work continues to inform and inspire me, not only as a counsellor but also as a human being. ■

About John

Now: Private practitioner working in Brighton and online via Zoom.

Once was: Freelance computer programmer and creator of the world's first recruitment website, www.jobserve.com - the first 'dot com' business to receive a Queen's Award for Enterprise.

First paid job: Raking bunkers at a golf course.

 Who would you like to answer the questionnaire? Email your suggestions to therapytoday@thinkpublishing.co.uk