**Tiga-Rose Nercassian transcript**

**Hello, and welcome to the BACP Communities of Practice podcast.**

**Welcome to the Communities of Practice Podcast Series, episode three. I'm Rebecca Stew. the Communities of Practice lead, and today, I'm joined by Tiga-Rose Nercessian. An intimacy coach, and sex and relationship therapist. Tiga-Rose, can you tell me a little bit about what led you to become a therapist, and the types of practice that you focus on?**

Hi. Yes, certainly, good question. So, it was quite a journey. I started off having counselling and therapy myself. Which I had sort of mixed experiences with, and at that point, I was mostly in teaching, which I really enjoyed. Actually, the part I enjoyed most was the more kind of soft skills, social side, helping the kids who were struggling emotionally, psychologically. Then I thought about training as a play therapist, and wandered down various pathways around counselling, and coaching. Actually, ended up training as a sex and relationship therapist instead.

**That's quite a journey. You joined us on the community's champions. You're the champion for the psychosexual and relationship therapy community, which has some really interesting discussions on. You've posted about the importance of having a diverse referral network, that covers a wide range of intimacy therapies, than just talking therapy. How do you currently go about building your network? Are there any gaps you're yet to fill, in terms of your client needs you've encountered?**

That's a really good question, I would say it definitely takes time to build a network. As someone who is very much an introvert, I tend to not attend networking events. With COVID, it's been really tough to do in-person events, until quite recently. So, yes, partly through online communities, like the communities of practice, but also through going to events that I want to attend, that might be the sort of things that my clients attend. Whether that's sex parties, or kink parties, or queer space events. I often meet other therapists. It's amazing how often these events are actually organised by people who are trained counsellors or therapists. We seem to be everywhere, and then there's gaps. I would say the big gap is one that's controversial to the BACP, in terms of sexual surrogacy. So, actually, people who can do hands-on work. there's a big debate about how we include people who do touch-based work, which can be regulated. for example, in the US, there's a bit more of it. it can be difficult to find people to refer to, who do touch-based work that is still within our guidelines.

**Is that an area that you think BACP should be looking into?**

Absolutely, and it's an ongoing area of controversy. It's something that I feel passionately about, because, for example, people with disabilities who need, for example, a carer to help them, I think they still deserve to have sex, if they want to. That's often easier, facilitated with professional help.

**In your community, you've posed an interesting question about whether specific names for conditions can be confusing and unhelpful to therapists and clients. What do you tend to use in your own therapy?**

Another good question. There are two points that I want to make with this. First of all, we're in a very strange time where people are self-diagnosing a lot. So, I often find, and I think a lot of us therapists and counsellors get people turning up, saying,' I've looked online and I've got BPD.' Or OCD. One of the lovely things about being a therapist is that it's not my job to diagnose. I'm now having to work with people who have already made up their mind about things. So, for some people, they're quite attached to this label, and that's what we get to work with. Some people do have a formal diagnosis, and obviously, that's a bit different. So, I think some people come with these labels, and that's one thing.

The other side of that is, I used to live in Oxford, so my practice was in Oxford. I had a huge amount of academics, who all loved labels, so they could go off and think about and research. It made them feel at home, to have something that they could study. Now, I'd say about 80 per cent of my practice is neurodivergent. So, I've got a lot of autistic and ADHD clients. They've already spent at least a chunk of their life with a label. Especially those who have a formal diagnosis. So, for them, it's something that can just be an additional layer to how they already define themselves. That said, I tend not to use clinical terms, unless I think it's useful, because for a lot of us, it just feels like you're being put in a box, and that your body is being medicalised. I don't see that as very empowering for most people.

**What made you get involved in the communities practice, as one of our community champions?**

It can be very, very lonely, being a therapist, or a counsellor. You've got to do a lot of decision making, kind of in the moment. It's a bit like teaching. So, you're always with people, but you're mostly alone in your role. So, for me, I've really found being parts of different communities of practice has really helped. Given how big the BACP is, it seemed like a great opportunity to connect with other people in the same field, on a closed platform. I think it's super important that we have public spaces, where we can talk about our work, and have input from maybe non-therapists, and have that kind of, let's say, cross-cultural conversation. I also think it's important for us to have spaces where we can talk about things maybe we're not so sure about or get different perspectives. Without necessarily having to be concerned about what clients might think of what we're publishing, or something like that. So, I think it serves an important purpose to give us, as counsellors and therapists, a safe space to talk about our work.

**Really good to hear. A lot of the feedback we've had from the BACP membership is that they feel very isolated and lonely within the role. So, yes, we're trying to do all we can to help that. You've touched on it a little bit there, but how do you see the platform enhancing counselling and psychotherapy as a practice?**

Well, I'm going to be a bit of a BACP swot here and say, because I'm also on the mentorship program, and that has been amazing in a different way. I think, without sounding too much of a suck-up, we often don't know how much is available. I had no idea that there was so much in the BACP. Certainly, because I'm part of other regulatory bodies that are much smaller, in contrast, BACP has, let's say, many arms, that I don't think we necessarily all know about. Even reading other comments, other posts, in the community of practice, I found out about things that are happening within the BACP, that are of interest to me. I might not have found out about other ways. So, I think so many of us are working online. It's a real opportunity for us to connect, and for new things to arise.

That's where, I would say this, as a relationship therapist, the magic is in the connection. As we connect with new and different people, all sorts of things could come of it. I think one thing that it can do is give space to minority voices. Maybe groups of therapists, who might not make it into the formal institutional structures of the BACP. There's often the criticism that the structure is quite rigid, and it can almost feel a little bit bullying, because the regulations are so strict. I feel that there's a grassroots opportunity to gather some voices, and potentially challenge the old way. Which will actually bring a new lease of life to the BACP, and update it to match the needs of the younger generations of therapists and counsellors. Maybe that's me just wanting a bit of revolutionary change!

**It's nice to hear the feedback, and it was really nice to hear about how you got into therapy. It sounds like it wasn't as much of a conventional route, as well. Love what you said about the magic being in the connection. I think that hits the nail on the head, doesn't it? It's all about connection, and not feeling like you're on your own. So, thank you so much for being my guest today, and look forward to speaking to you again.**

Thank you very much.

**Thank you for listening to the BACP Communities of Practice podcast. We hope you enjoyed it, and don't forget, you can get in touch via communities@bacp.co.uk, if you'd like more information on how to get involved with the Communities of Practice platform.**