

IS THE BEST YET TO COME?

RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT THE AGEING PROCESS CONFERS ADVANTAGES SUCH AS LIVED EXPERIENCE, PATIENCE AND WISDOM - ALL VALUABLE SKILLS FOR PSYCHOTHERAPISTS. HERE, UKCP PSYCHOTHERAPISTS REFLECT ON THE PROS AND CONS OF AGEING. BY **CATHARINE ARNOLD**



‘Ageing self-discloses vulnerability’

Silva Neves, UKCP-registered psychosexual and relationship psychotherapist and clinical supervisor

‘The issue of ageing is very interesting in our profession. On one hand, the older we are, the wiser we are perceived to be by the public and our peers. But ageing is also a vulnerable process, which interferes with the concept of a “blank screen” therapist; if the therapist is visibly aged, there’s an automatic self-disclosure of vulnerability.

‘Recently, I lost my supervisor to her sudden death. It reminded me how fragile life is, but also how important she was to me. Although she was older, I perceived her as healthy and energising, so her passing was a shock. As I’m grieving, I’m also having to find a new supervisor. I don’t want someone

“too old”, but “old enough” to be more experienced than me for clinical guidance. As a gender, sexual and relationship diversity (GSRD) practitioner, I also need to know if they are up to date with GSRD. A misconception of mine when searching for a new supervisor is that older therapists may be operating from a position where heteronormativity was less challenged than it is now. So, should I choose an older supervisor who also identifies as LGBTQ+?

‘The unexpected loss of my supervisor has highlighted some of my misconceptions about the age of therapists.’ >

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'Midlife is wonderful if lived authentically'

Dr Julie Hannan, integrative psychotherapist and author of *The Midlife Crisis Handbook*

Dr Julie Hannan is a chartered psychologist and psychotherapist. By her mid-40s, Hannan's career was thriving, but her interest in work started to wane, compounded by her two grown-up children leaving home. 'I was experiencing confusion and loss around the sense of my professional self and the loss of my role as a mother, which hit harder than I ever expected.'

Realising that she was suffering from an identity crisis triggered by a profound loss of everything that had mattered, Hannan discovered that there was a lack of practical guidance.

'Many of the psychotherapy manuals were flippant and dismissive, underlined by this push to

refer to these symptoms as an "awakening" rather than a "crisis". It certainly didn't feel like a positive awakening to me.' Hannan found her way through when she discovered that the sense of bewilderment and loss in midlife has a name – liminality, from the Latin word *limen*, meaning threshold, or the point at which change is inevitable. It is during this phase that steps to deal with midlife crisis can be most impactful, Hannan believes. 'If you are to be happy in the second half of your life, you need to slowly cut off the dead wood and free yourself to live more authentically,' she says. 'Midlife can be wonderful if it is lived authentically and free from the ghosts of the past.' >

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