

Shame, Coercive Control and Narcissistic Abuse
*Why These Clients Pull Therapists Off Course — and How to Stay
Clinically Grounded*
A One-Day Clinical Workshop with
Christiane Sanderson

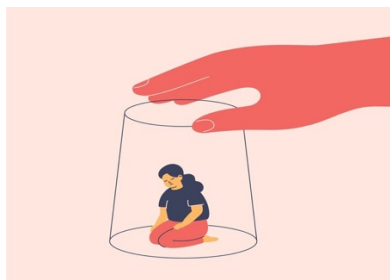
Live event in Dublin
30 October 2026, Friday

Times:
10:00am to 4:00pm, London UK

Venue:
Aloft Dublin City, 1 Mill St, The Liberties, Dublin, D08 XK58

CPD hours: 5

All live attendance tickets now include complimentary access to a video recorded version for 1 year



Note: no online streaming is available for this event. Lunch is provided to delegates attending in person.

A Highly Requested Return to Dublin

Christiane Sanderson returns to Dublin by popular demand, following a sold-out training that drew clinicians from across Ireland and the UK.

Participants in last year's workshop - many of whom travelled considerable distances to attend; spoke not only of the clinical depth, but of the rare opportunity to think carefully - alongside peers; about complex relational work that often resists quick formulation.

This one-day workshop builds on that momentum, turning to a set of clinical presentations many therapists encounter regularly, yet often find uniquely difficult to hold their ground within.

Places are limited. Last year's workshop reached capacity well in advance.

"He always said it was because he loved me."

The client says it carefully. Choosing words. Watching your face.



"He just couldn't stand the thought of losing me."
You hear something else.

The phone that was checked. The friends who fell away. The apologies she learned to make before she fully understood what she had done. The slow erosion of her own perception — until she could no longer trust what she remembered, or felt, or knew to be true.

Nothing that would hold up in a courtroom. Nothing she could name in a single sentence.
And yet.

She is sitting across from you now, more uncertain of herself than she has ever been. The relationship is over. But the damage continues.

And something else begins to happen — quietly, almost imperceptibly — in the room.

The Architecture of Coercive Control

Coercive control is not a single act. It is a pattern — a sustained campaign of psychological domination in which the tools of intimacy are turned against the person they are meant to protect.

It operates through the ordinary textures of daily life: the joke that isn't quite a joke, the withdrawal that teaches compliance, the affection that arrives only when earned. Because it so rarely involves a single identifiable violation, it is frequently invisible to those outside the relationship — and, for a long time, to those inside it.

Evan Stark's foundational work established coercive control as a distinct form of intimate partner abuse - defined not by episodic violence, but by the systematic removal of a person's autonomy, liberty, and sense of reality (Stark, 2007). The consequences - for identity, attachment, and self-perception - extend far beyond the relationship itself.

Survivors frequently arrive in therapy carrying not clarity, but confusion. **They doubt their memories. They minimise. They return, in imagination, to the relationship - not because they lack insight, but because insight alone does not dissolve a trauma bond.**

When the Work Starts Working on the Therapist

For the therapist, this is some of the most demanding clinical territory there is.
Not simply because of the client's history — but because of what begins to happen internally in response to it.

A subtle pressure to get it right. A creeping uncertainty about one's own perception. A pull toward reassurance — or toward silence. Moments where clarity gives way to hesitation. Where formulation begins to feel just slightly out of reach.

These shifts are rarely dramatic. But they are clinically significant.

Because when the therapist's internal position becomes destabilised — even slightly — the therapy itself begins to reorganise around that instability. The work continues. But not always in the direction we intend.

Shame as the Architecture of Control — and Its Impact in the Room



At the centre of narcissistic and coercively controlling relationships sits a particular kind of shame — not the ordinary shame of failure or embarrassment, but a deeper structural shame, cultivated and maintained through relational manipulation.

The abuser weaponises attachment. Closeness amplifies vulnerability. Vulnerability becomes evidence of inadequacy. Over time, the survivor comes to inhabit the identity the relationship has constructed.

June Price Tangney's research demonstrates that shame does not motivate change — it paralyses. It turns the self into the problem. And when the self becomes the problem, the relationship that constructed it can appear - paradoxically - as the solution.

In the consulting room, this dynamic does not remain contained within the client. It enters the relational field. Therapists working with these presentations may begin to notice self-doubt that feels disproportionate to the clinical situation, a heightened sensitivity to getting something wrong, and a pull toward over-accommodation or over-correction that is difficult to account for rationally.

The client's internal world is no longer just being described. It is being recreated — subtly — in the therapeutic relationship.

The Trauma Bond: Why Leaving Is Not Enough

Clinicians frequently encounter a confounding reality: the client who has left the relationship has not, in any psychologically meaningful sense, left.

Trauma bonding - formed through intermittent reinforcement, threat, and conditional approval — operates at the level of the nervous system. Mary Ann Dutton's work demonstrates that unpredictable reward structures produce the most persistent attachment behaviours — not despite the pain they cause, but partly because of it (Dutton & Goodman, 2005).

The result is a client who appears insightful yet stuck, clear yet pulled back, committed to change yet unable to sustain it. Without a precise framework for understanding what is happening, therapists can find themselves caught in a parallel process — trying harder, explaining more, increasing effort — while movement remains elusive.

Recognising this pattern, and working with it rather than against it, is one of the central clinical skills this workshop addresses.

A Clinical Illustration

Aoife (not her real name) ended a four-year relationship fourteen months before she came to therapy. It took eight sessions before she used the word control.

By then, a clearer picture had emerged: gaslighting, isolation, cycles of idealisation and contempt, and a growing distrust of her own perception.

In the room, Aoife was engaged, thoughtful, and highly attuned to the therapist. She monitored tone. She watched for shifts. She checked — repeatedly — whether she was doing it right.

The therapist noticed something else. A subtle pressure. A sense of needing to respond carefully. A hesitation that had not been present in other cases.

The relational pattern was no longer just Aoife's history. It was live.



The question was no longer only what had happened to Aoife — but what was now happening between them.

At the point of writing, that question remains open.

What This Workshop Will Explore

Drawing on over three decades of clinical practice, Christiane Sanderson will guide participants through both the client dynamics and the therapist impact inherent in this work. Across the day, the workshop will explore:

- ◆ **The psychological architecture of coercive control** — how domination is established and maintained through everyday relational dynamics, and why it so frequently evades identification
- ◆ **Shame as a mechanism of control** — and how it becomes active within the therapeutic relationship itself
- ◆ **Trauma bonding and persistent attachment** — why clients remain psychologically tied to harmful relationships long after they have ended
- ◆ **Gaslighting and epistemic injury** — and how reality distortion affects both client and therapist perception
- ◆ **Recognising when the therapist is being pulled off course** — early indicators of uncertainty, over-involvement, or loss of clinical clarity
- ◆ **Working with countertransference in high-complexity cases** — using therapist responses as clinical data, without becoming organised by them
- ◆ **Differentiating trauma responses from personality pathology** — with direct implications for formulation, diagnosis, and treatment planning
- ◆ **Practical interventions that restore clarity, agency, and relational safety** — designed for immediate integration into existing practice

Participants will leave with a clearer, more precise framework for working with these presentations — and for maintaining their own clinical position within them.

Why This Training — Why Now

Coercive control was criminalised in Ireland under the Domestic Violence Act 2018. Yet clinical recognition continues to lag behind legislative awareness.

Data from Safelreland (2023) indicates that one in four women in Ireland will experience intimate partner violence, with psychological and coercive abuse significantly underreported. These clients are already in the consulting room — often presenting with diagnostic ambiguity, apparent treatment resistance, and relational complexity that exceeds standard clinical frameworks.

This training addresses that gap directly. Not only in understanding the client, but in understanding the therapist's own position within the work.

Christiane Sanderson is among the most respected figures in the field of developmental trauma and relational harm. With over three decades of clinical practice, research, and teaching, her work on coercive control, shame, and attachment disruption has informed clinical practice across the UK, Ireland, and internationally.



- ▶ **A Framework Built From Clinical Reality** — grounded in accumulated clinical wisdom rather than theoretical abstraction, drawn from decades of work with the complex, layered presentations that arrive in real consulting rooms.
- ▶ **Precision Tools With Immediate Application** — practical approaches for the specific challenges this client population presents, designed for integration into existing practice from the day after the workshop.
- ▶ **The Diagnostic Clarity This Work Demands** — the conceptual and practical foundation to formulate these presentations accurately, communicate them credibly, and treat them effectively.

A Day of In-Person Clinical Depth

Held at Aloft Dublin in the historic Liberties district, this one-day workshop offers more than theoretical input. It provides a focused day of serious clinical thinking, space for reflection and integration, and the opportunity to work alongside peers operating at a similar level of complexity.

Stepping away from the demands of daily clinical work, the day is structured to support sustained attention and meaningful professional exchange — including a working lunch.

Who Should Attend

- ✓ Psychotherapists and psychologists working with trauma, coercive control, and relational complexity
- ✓ Clinicians encountering clients affected by narcissistic or psychologically controlling relationships
- ✓ Practitioners seeking greater clarity in complex or treatment-resistant cases
- ✓ Mental health professionals working in domestic abuse or trauma services
- ✓ Clinical supervisors supporting high-intensity relational caseloads

A Final Reflection

These cases do not only challenge our clinical skill. They test our capacity to remain steady — to think clearly — and to hold our position in the face of powerful relational dynamics.

The question is not whether we are affected by this work. It is whether we can recognise how we are affected — and work with that, rather than against it.

Secure Your Place

Christiane's previous Dublin workshop reached capacity well in advance. Early booking is strongly recommended.

Reserve your place now — and return to your practice with greater clarity, stability, and clinical precision the very next day.

About the speaker

Christiane Sanderson BSc, MSc. is an Honorary Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Roehampton, of London with 35 years of experience working with survivors of childhood sexual abuse and sexual violence. She has delivered consultancy, continuous professional development and professional training for parents, teachers, social workers, nurses, therapists, counsellors, solicitors, the NSPCC, the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Committee, the Methodist Church, the Metropolitan Police Service, SOLACE, the Refugee Council, Birmingham City Council Youth Offending Team, and HMP Bronzefield.

She is the author of *Counselling Skills for Working with Shame*, *Counselling Skills for Working with Trauma: Healing from Child Sexual Abuse, Sexual Violence and Domestic Abuse*, *Counselling Adult Survivors of Child*



Sexual Abuse, 3rd edition, Counselling Survivors of Domestic Abuse, The Seduction of Children: Empowering Parents and Teachers to Protect Children from Child Sexual Abuse, and Introduction to Counselling Survivors of Interpersonal Trauma, all published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers. She has also written The Warrior Within: A One in Four Handbook to Aid Recovery from Sexual Violence; The Spirit Within: A One in Four Handbook to Aid Recovery from Religious Sexual Abuse Across All Faiths and Responding to Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse: A pocket guide for professionals, partners, families and friends for the charity One in Four for whom she is a trustee.

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