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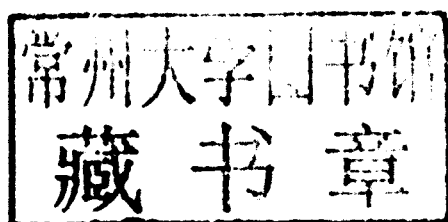
THERAPY AND BEYOND

Counselling Psychology Contributions to Therapeutic and Social Issues

Therapy and Beyond

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Edited by Martin Milton



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To Stuart who lets me think and Jordan who stops me. . .

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Martin is Senior Lecturer on the University of Surrey practitioner doctorate in psychotherapeutic and counselling psychology and his research and specialist interests include lesbian and gay affirmative psychology and psychotherapy, and existential psychotherapy and new and burgeoning interests in ecotherapy and the therapeutic aspects of the natural world.

Martin is a former Chair of the BPS Division of Counselling Psychology and served on the Committee of the BPS Lesbian and Gay Psychology section. He remains active in these organisations as a member of the Editorial Board for *Psychology and Sexuality* and *Counselling Psychology Review*, and as a member of the International Advisory Board to *Psychology of Sexualities Review*. Martin is also on the editorial board of the international journal *Ecopsychology* and of *Existential Analysis*.

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Dr Riccardo Draghi-Lorenz is Director of the Practitioner Doctorate in Psychotherapeutic and Counselling Psychology at the University of Surrey. He is particularly interested in theoretical integration/eclecticism, cultural differences and psychotherapy, the processes underlying intersubjective connectedness and the social and emotional development of infants

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Dr Donal McAteer obtained his doctorate in Psychotherapeutic and Counselling Psychology from the University of Surrey in 2006. His areas of specialist interest are the therapeutic process and relationship, and the philosophical foundations of counselling psychology. He currently has an appointment with a Psychological Therapies Team in the NHS in Derry, Northern Ireland, where he works with adults experiencing psychological and emotional distress. He is currently acting as Co-Chair of the group working to establish a Northern Ireland Branch of the Division of Counselling Psychology.

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Dr Deborah Rafalin, CPsychol is a practising HPC-registered counselling psychologist. She obtained her Doctorate in Psychotherapeutic and Counselling Psychology from the University of Surrey in 1998. Deborah is a Senior Lecturer on the Practitioner Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at City University, London and her areas of specialist interest include qualitative research methodologies and identity threat. Deborah also works as a consultant to the NHS and the Third Sector on various projects, is a professional member of the fitness to practice and competency panels at the HPC and runs her own private practice

Foreword

Emmy van Deurzen

This book takes a fresh and vigorous look at counselling psychology and invites us to think carefully about the present state and future direction of our profession. It challenges current assumptions that counselling psychologists have to fit in with. It considers and questions the medical, economic and political agendas that oppress contemporary practice. It presents us with the many alternatives that are available and demonstrates the dangers of following a single established model. It sometimes cautiously and sometimes enthusiastically argues the case of pluralism, phenomenology, community, collaboration and ecology as ways of finding interesting new answers to the questions posed by our work with clients of diverse backgrounds and orientations. It proposes alternatives to the categorisation of distress and to the oppressive dichotomies of mental health and illness.

This book provides a stimulating and creative reappraisal of what we usually take for granted. Its chapters are always based in the interaction between theory and practice, drawing new ideas from disciplined thought about experience. It shows that it is only in a continuous exploration of new horizons and by opening a wide range of existential vistas that science and human understanding become validated by life itself. Many of the chapters are a good source of teaching materials to challenge new trainees. But they are even more relevant in the context of continuing professional development. For many of us have become complacent, jaded or battle-fatigued when constantly contending with increasingly tight professional boundaries and regulations. Some of these words will uplift us, some will rattle our cages and all will challenge the status quo.

This is a timely volume. What we are witnessing at the moment is a process of one-dimensional professionalisation which is more interested in quanti-

tative than qualitative outcomes and favours approaches that can be rolled out across the board, tempting us into the shallows. What the contributors to this book are saying is that this short-sighted focus is dangerous and that we need to rethink our values and commitments as counselling psychologists and be true to the principles on which we founded this profession, making sure it remains fit for purpose.

In spite of its serious agenda, the book is light on its feet and easy to read. It will stimulate, intrigue and provoke thought in those who are willing to engage in this important professional debate. Its chapters have been written by the staff and alumni of the well-established doctoral programme in Psychotherapeutic and Counselling Psychology at the University of Surrey, demonstrating the breadth and depth of this school. Here is the rich harvest of fifteen and more years of research and debate. It speaks for itself and will reverberate with other courses, providing many counselling psychology students with new ideas for their own investigations. Each contributor explores the boundaries and borders of the territory of counselling psychology and refocuses the definitions and aspirations of our profession. Together, they formulate a call to our conscience. What is the original mission of our profession and what has become of it? How do we wish to continue to practise our profession in the current climate?

The book helps us to address these and other questions, as it reminds us of the paradigmatic changes our profession has been through and cautions us not to lose the essence of our profession, nor to lose touch with our commitment to help others in understanding their troubled lives. We can get too involved with research and technique and lose sight of what really matters. It is no solution to filter out the best bits of different therapeutic traditions and serve these up in a smorgasbord of tasty titbits, which are not sufficient to satisfy our clients' hunger for real nourishment. The kind of therapeutic integration proposed by low-grade cognitive behavioural therapies may be pragmatically sound but lacks philosophical clarity and depth. The objective should certainly not be simply to integrate established traditions in order to dissolve them. Disciplined pluralism is about working with diversity by holding on to the tensions and by making continuous efforts to creatively juxtapose, maintaining openness and flexibility. It is not about arriving at a dogmatic uniformity that suffocates our responsiveness to clients' predicaments.

As Riccardo Draghi-Lorenz, one of the contributors to this book, argues in his conclusion:

As is often the case, however, the scientific battle is between reductivists, who fail to understand how little we really comprehend, and those open to the ever-surprising complexity of the human condition. In this situation

theoretical and epistemological differences are to be carefully nurtured, for if science were to proceed by consensus, it would not proceed at all.

Therapy and Beyond shows convincingly that the struggle with different perspectives is more important than reductionist unity of practice. We may be tempted to go along with the easy options and quasi-certainties currently offered us in our field, but we will only ignore the tensions and the perennial need to remain open to doubt and uncertainty at our peril. The entire field of therapy and counselling, and with it the field of counselling psychology, is currently undergoing transformation. We should not assume that change is necessarily change for the better. Important lessons have been learnt over the past decades of careful practice and these can easily be forgotten if we become complacent about homogenisation and too enamoured of evidence-based practices that merely cloak human understanding in an external mantle of knowledge.

This book reminds us that the evidence of good human living is far more complex than some would have us believe. It shows that we need to be prepared to engage with the facts and think about them carefully. Only if we are unafraid of opposing superficially attractive solutions can we develop the multidimensional approach that truly serves our clients. For this to happen we need to have the courage of our conviction that it is our clients' wellbeing that matters most. Then we can maintain a rigorously searching attitude, combine different perspectives and go beyond the quick-fix solutions or the shallow facts of economically driven practice. This book reminds us that life is more complex and precious than what outcome research captures. We owe it to our clients and to ourselves to look beyond the obvious and to keep challenging and renewing our understanding, not just of our profession but of the lives of the clients we set out to serve.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Therapy and Beyond: Counselling Psychology Contributions to Therapeutic and Social Issues

Martin Milton

Counselling Psychology

British counselling psychology is well into its second decade, having formally come into being when the British Psychological Society established the Division of Counselling Psychology in 1994. Counselling psychology is postmodern and multi-modal in nature, with a bent towards a holistic perspective that is attentive to issues as they manifest in psychological therapy, research, individual lives and in the wider world.

During its development, counselling psychology has moved beyond the process of initial definition where much of the initial discourse – our own and that of others – was focused on making distinct its relationship between this discipline and those professions it was similar to or different from, models it used or did not use and contexts with which it engaged. Counselling psychology is now able to elucidate the significant contributions it makes, both to the practice of psychological therapy and to research, policy development and new and innovative contributions to society. In this regard the profession is a forward-looking one that is extending its domain of practice into areas other than the consulting room. And this is one of the functions of this book – to showcase the ways in which a mature use of the knowledge base and practice of counselling psychology is now firmly contributing to a range of therapeutic and social issues.

One perspective that was present at the birth of British counselling psychology and remains a core philosophical, academic, ethical and therapeutic priority for counselling psychology is the understanding of people as 'relational beings'. While collaborating with people and contexts that draw on a range of perspectives, including the traditional views of people as independent entities, counselling psychology has always recognised that relational perspectives have an enormous contribution to make to understanding people and working towards greater wellbeing. This focus is obvious in terms of relationships between therapist and client, within families and between intimate partners; but it is one that extends to understanding the relationships people have with themselves in terms of identity, self-esteem and the like, and in terms of our wider cultural and socio-political wellbeing.

The World in Which We Exist

Life has always been challenging and modern life is no different. It is complex, multi-factored and for some of the time, terribly stressful. Not only do we suffer from such existential constants of anxiety, isolation, death and meaninglessness, but we also feel cheated when the seductive promises of contemporary life fail to remove the hurdles we face and when our world is different from the way we hope, expect or want it to be.

People struggle in a variety of ways, sometimes with themselves, sometimes with families and friends and often with the world at large. The struggles that people experience are wide-ranging and manifest physically, socially and in more intimate ways. This is not to mention the damage that affects us when we are caught up in war, genocide or poverty. The fact that mild to moderate mental health problems are now termed 'common' is suggestive of significant difficulty and it is also interesting that, despite the fact that there has been measurable decrease in actual physical harm to children in Britain recently, our sense of concern has grown enormously in the last few years.

While these experiences might be seen as 'predictable difficulties' (Deurzen, 2009, p. 80) they are often painful and debilitating, affecting us mentally and emotionally, physically and interpersonally. There are times when the distress is considered excessive or the isolation too extreme and people turn to the range of professionals to help make sense of their panic, pain and confusion, which they hope these professionals can make it better. It is reassuring to know that psychological interventions *are* effective and helpful for people with a range of difficulties.

Engaging with the painful side of human experience is a part of the work of counselling psychologists, but of course, human experience is not always stressful and counselling psychology is not only about engaging with distress; we are also interested in human wellbeing. It's not only about exploring the experience of an individual; counselling psychologists also explore a much wider range of relevant human phenomena.

People's day-to-day interactions are intimately linked to the huge advances we have made in social, political and economic areas. These developments have advantages for our quality of life as we enjoy great health benefits, longer lifespans, medical assistance to cure and rehabilitate us after infections and illnesses. Physically our lives have become easier as we suffer fewer illnesses, recover more quickly when we do get ill and our everyday exertions are limited. Actually, it is getting to the point where our comfort may be what is bad for us, with few of us needing to walk great distances to secure food or water – if we don't just jump in the car to nip to the supermarket, we order online. Instead of walking great distances across the savannah as our bipedal species is designed to do, we now utilise the more comfortable technologies of the car, bus or train.

So counselling psychology, the scientific and applied field that it is, is interested in a holistic view of humanity's experience, what makes us tick, what hurts us and what is helpful. Of course, it is interested in psychological therapy, but its knowledge base is equally relevant to research, social policy and understanding the effects of oppression and exploitation. It is engaged with the personal and political, its knowledge and skills mean it has contributions to make at a therapeutic and policy level and with the overlap of the ethical and the scientific.

Therapy and Beyond

Change is happening at a furious rate in the field of public sector health care provision. The contributors and I recognise that today's professional reality may simply be stepping stones *en route* to a variety of other future identities and practices. Keeping this in mind, this book takes a moment to stop and consider the profession, its current body of knowledge and array of practices and to look at innovative and potential new developments.

The contributors and I hope that readers will find this book useful for a variety of reasons – it might be used to inform people about the profession, but it can also be used to facilitate critical thinking about wider issues and practices that counselling psychology is involved with alongside other applied psychologists, mental health professionals and government bodies.

As readers journey through the book, they are invited to reflect on – and debate – a number of therapeutic and social issues.

The book focuses on some of the main areas of psychotherapeutic and counselling psychology theory, practice and research and their application in a range of settings. Of course, there are inevitably domains that are not represented in this volume and while a complete encyclopaedia was not possible, we do regret the practical issues that mean we have had to limit the scope of this book . . . for now.

Section 1 provides the reader with an overview of the philosophical stances that underpin knowledge and practice and the ways in which counselling psychology engages with this rich spread of information. It addresses the ways in which this informs core aspects of the therapeutic professions, with attention to the therapeutic relationship, our understanding of human distress and consideration of what this means for the notion of ethical practice.

Section 2 looks at the contemporary use of traditional models of practice and the ways in which humanistic, psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural and existential models are helpful in informative and innovative ways – not just as distinct ways of seeing the world or practicing therapy but also as perspectives to contribute to wider debates – therapeutic, social and political – as to what facilitates wellbeing and limits damage and distress.

Section 3 looks at new developments in the discipline and how counselling psychology is helping develop wider understandings of people and contributing to society in new and novel ways. It recognises that academic ghettos are limiting and draws on information and knowledge bases sometimes seen as the province of other sciences and other fields. In doing so, section three outlines the ways in which a counselling psychology perspective can assist individual and wider debates on such dimensions of human life as sport and spirituality, sexuality and the environment. In this way it is thought-provoking, provocative and highlights the importance of applying our knowledge base in creative ways.

Reference

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