

Research Report

John Rowan

A recent report on the subject of rapport says that there is one simple way to make the client feel that a counsellor is really understanding them, and that is to lean forward. But not just any amount of lean will do. It must be 41 degrees or more — quite a lot of lean. And the findings are that a lesser degree of lean — 16 to 40 degrees — is much less effective in ensuring high rapport, as experienced by the client. No lean at all is even less effective.

The research method itself is of interest. A counselling psychologist was trained to be a 'standard client'. First of all a real interview around a felt concern was recorded. Then sixteen key biographical, environmental and emotional statements were taken from that interview and printed in large type on cards. These cards were then placed behind the head of the person conducting the interview. They were used during the course of the session,

verbatim and in order. The 'standard client' had a five button device, hidden from the counsellor, and at intervals suggested by a bug in the earpiece of the device she recorded her level of rapport. The intervals were one minute apart. At the same time three video cameras recorded side and front views of both client and counsellor. Forward lean was determined by applying a protractor to the video screen.

The authors suggest that the training of counsellors could be improved by teaching them to lean forward more, because the extreme lean 'appeared to be most effective if maintained fairly steadily during the whole of the present interviews'.

Christopher F. Sharpley and Anastasia Sagris, 'When does counsellor forward lean influence client-perceived rapport?' *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling* 23/3 387-394, 1995

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Beyond the Brain

Cambridge, August 1995

Richard House

In recent years there has been a minor explosion of interest in what is termed 'consciousness research'. This impressive

conference was organised jointly by the Scientific and Medical Network and the Institute of Noetic Sciences (Sausalito,

California). Its unifying theme was the necessity for a new epistemology of consciousness that transcends the increasingly inadequate conventional scientific paradigm.

There were many aspects of the conference structure, however, which only served to reinforce and buttress the inadequate conventional scientific way-of-being and apprehending the world. People were talking and thinking about a new paradigm while still using the very conventional epistemologies and ontologies that we are trying to transcend. What was glaringly missing was a full, open and honest engagement with the emotional rootedness of the old 'scientistic' paradigm. From a psychodynamic perspective, the ideology of the old paradigm of 'scientific mindedness' is surely rooted in species-wide, commonly held (and commonly repressed) pre-, peri- and post-natal developmental traumata, as David Wasdell's often neglected work so eloquently articulates (see *Self & Society*, May 1992 and November 1994). And the dysfunctional ideologies of the conventional scientific paradigm form a crucial component of the sedimented defensive structure that we have as a species unconsciously built up to defend ourselves against what is in (f)antasy unbearable, uncontainable, disintegrative and annihilating in our developmental histories.

Fear and anxiety were barely mentioned — a blatant but perhaps unsurprising absence, given the nature of this material. The deeply affecting paper by Charles Tart ('Enlightenment, altered states, endarkenment') ignored the issue of pain, and our enormously powerful and

often ingeniously constructed psychic defences against it. In his excellent presentation, 'The heuristic and healing potential of non-ordinary states of consciousness', Stanislav Grof did, if somewhat obliquely, address the question of traumatising pre- and peri-natal experience — but in a way that effectively colluded with his audience's individual and corporate psychic defences. There was no built-in conference space for experiential work to process personal material precipitated by the deeply affecting ideas that were being discussed. Further, there were just two female presenters out of a total of sixteen in a conference whose theme cried out for 'the feminine' as a way of moving beyond the masculinist scientistic paradigm. Jungian analyst Anne Baring's paper ('The sleeping beauty: the awakening of instinct into consciousness') seemed to have by far the greatest emotional impact.

While this was therefore an extremely stimulating conference, greatly appreciated by those present, it was also severely constrained. Humanistic and psychodynamic thinking have much to contribute to 'new-paradigm' ways of knowing — indeed, I see them as being absolutely indispensable; and David Wasdell's Meridian Matrix and the Norfolk Institute of Relational Studies, founded by Lindsay Cooke and Jill Hall, are at the leading edge in this regard.

One thing seems clear: it is grossly naive to assume that we can use the brain and the old structures alone to transcend the brain . . . for if it were that simple, then it would surely have happened a long time ago.