

# Self & SOCIETY LETTERS

Letters for the next issue of S&S should be with the editor by June 1st. Ed.

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Dear Editor,

The article by Chris Scott, advocating the Mindfields approach to psychotherapy, seems a bit dogmatic to me. He says that 'the evidence is unequivocal; personal therapy does not make people more effective in such work (Russell, R 1993)'. Roberta Russell actually did her review of the literature in the late 1970s, and her report was published in 1981. The 1993 edition is a slightly touched up version with little added. If we want to know about this issue, a more up-to-date account is to be found in the 1998 research of Susan Macran and David Shapiro, entitled 'The role of personal therapy for therapists: a review' (*British Journal of Medical Psychology* 71/1 13-25). I have half a chapter on this whole issue in my book *The future of training in psychotherapy and counselling* (Routledge 2005), in which I quote twenty different purposes which may be served by having one's own therapy.

The same dogmatism is to be found in his intemperate remarks on supervision, one of which is: 'The level of supervision expected of most practicing (sic) counsellors and therapists is just nonsense.' But most experts in the main fields of therapy believe supervision to be of the utmost importance if self-indulgence and narcissism are to be avoided. Again I have a chapter on this in the book quoted above.

In the light of these points, it is contradictory of the author to say, as he does, that 'We desperately need to discard outdated dogmas and ideas... and aim towards a more research based, outcome oriented philosophy.' Physician, heal thyself, we might muse.

More constructively, it seems worth saying that the instrumental approach, offered by Mindfields and other similar approaches, is valuable and necessary as a part of the therapeutic field. But it must not be allowed to invade the territory of the authentic approach, most favoured by humanistic therapists, nor the transpersonal approach which is less well known (and certainly not mentioned by Chris Scott) but equally important, in my view. If I may refer to my book again, it tries throughout to make the point that these three great approaches all need to have a place in any integrative training course.

Yours sincerely,  
**John Rowan**  
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Dear S&S,

I was interested to read Chris Scott's article 'The Doctrines of Psychology'. The issue of training therapy has been controversial ever since Freud began to establish his circle in Vienna.

However, the article raises some important concerns for me. In using, consciously or unconsciously, the metaphor of the 'sacred cow' Chris is adopting the New Labour tactic which Tony Blair used to modernise (emasculate) the Labour Party in the 1990's. Thus anyone who disagrees with The New Idea is automatically positioned as old fashioned; in this case as an unreconstructed psychotherapist who fleeces his clients, and other people's trainees, by giving them therapy they don't need and who probably opposes gay, divorced and women clergy to boot!

As I said earlier, the issue of training therapy *is* controversial and most colleagues I talk to who are involved in training have thought long and hard about how to make it work more effectively. I don't think many of us believe that training therapy '*specifically* and '*necessarily*' turns students into better therapists. But I'm not sure that such linear, causal thinking is helpful in this context, especially since there are a lot of variables which are difficult to control and measure. For instance, some of my past students have reported experiences to me which would suggest that some therapists consider themselves as an extra course tutor; proof reading essays, lending books and, in quite a few cases, expressing an opinion on the course curriculum and procedures! Similarly, the spirit in which the student approaches their training therapy is another variable which is difficult to standardise.

We can ask our students to have therapy, stipulate the number of hours or frequency, stipulate the qualifications and experience of the therapist and even, contentiously, their orientation. None of this guarantees that the student is going to acquire the insight, groundedness and capacity to work at relational depth which we require from our qualified practitioners. But is this the point? Most training courses involve an element of personal development which is another way of developing these qualities, but, even when they work well, PD groups tend to raise personal issues rather than working them through. Training therapy doesn't guarantee that students are going to become better therapists, but, in my twenty years of training experience, I've found it *does* make it more likely.

I have two more points to raise. The first is to express surprise that Chris Scott has chosen not to address the issues that John Rowan raised in his latest book about the future of training, which I recently reviewed in this journal. Has he read John's book? If not, I suggest he does, as it might give him an insight into the genuine concerns of the therapeutic community with regard to the Human Givens approach which cannot be dismissed as matters of orthodox doctrine and self-interest.

The second is a personal anecdote. I recently had the experience of being in a training cohort with a young man who'd had very little

experience of personal therapy. At first, his 'naive' view of the course material was interesting and possibly refreshing; rather in the way Chris Scott would like us to think of the Human Givens approach. Soon, however, the young man's lack of insight, both in terms of the depth of his understanding and especially into what was 'his stuff' and what belonged to the client, began to be experienced by his fellow trainees as painful and ultimately frustrating. I am very much reminded of that young man when I read Chris Scott's article.

Regards,  
**Geoff Lamb**

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Dear editor

I would like to thank John for his response to my article, it has acted like *informal* peer supervision, of which I am all in favour. Whilst at theological college, a tutor said that he thought I was being 'dogmatic about being un-dogmatic', which I recognise to be true. Perhaps what I should have said is 'personal therapy does not *necessarily* make people more effective'. I had hoped this point was made evident from the second part of the same paragraph. As part of personal development, which is what the BACP now look for, therapy may be absolutely right for *some* people, but I do not believe that the evidence, (both documented and experiential) supports the thesis that therapy should be a prerequisite for all trainees.

In terms of supervision, let me say that I am unequivocally in favour of it. What I am against is its over regulation, which I believe, does not guarantee quality, but only quantity. It seems to me that the therapeutic community (like the NHS) has become obsessed with ticking the right boxes; this in itself will not prevent self-indulgence or narcissism in its practitioners. Surely the evidence we should be looking for is not how many hours and how much money therapists spend on supervision, but on how *few* sessions it takes for their clients to feel well again?

On John's final point about not allowing the instrumental approach to 'invade' the authentic and transpersonal approaches, I wholeheartedly disagree. I believe that all of the major approaches need to be thus 'invaded' in order to enliven and refresh them. Surely any approach that does not welcome the challenge of alternative insights (and reforms accordingly) becomes like a sect, or an established religion, complete with its sacred cows?

In response to Geoff's letter, I would suggest that every institution or organisation is, over time, liable to accumulate some 'sacred cows'. Is he suggesting that we just let them peacefully graze? In my position as a priest, I do not believe anything in my faith tradition is beyond question and scrutiny; perhaps I am being naive to think the same might be true in the therapeutic community? Naivety can, of course, come through simply being unaware, or it can come from a conscious endeavour, as in art, to avoid subtlety or conventional technique. Of course, if I am naive in the sense of being unaware, it

might indicate that the hundreds of hours of training analysis I had, had little effect!

It is true to say that, at the time of writing the article (well over a year ago now) I had not read John Rowan's recent book, and as yet, still have not, but I will correct that omission in the near future.

**Chris Scott**

**S&S and AHP(B) AGM & WORKSHOP**

**Saturday 20 May 2006**

**Non-members very welcome**

**10.30am-5pm**

**Connaught Hall**

**36-45 Tavistock Square (SW corner)**

**London WC1H 9EX**

**Morning Workshop**

**Led by Els van Ooijen**

**Being and Becoming: a Celebration**

We will take a creative and positive look at who we are, what we do and why we do it - leading to a celebration of the humanistic way of living and being; and of AHP(B) and the ways in which we would like to move forward.

Els van Ooijen is a BACP accredited counsellor and UKCP registered psychotherapist and a visiting lecturer at the University of Wales. She is currently carrying out a doctorate research project at Metanoia entitled 'A personal reflection on the praxis of integrative psychotherapy'. Creative reflection and supervision form an important part of this research. Els was born in the Netherlands but has been in the UK for many years.

**Buffet Lunch**

**Afternoon**

**AGM and the results of the Membership Survey**

**Discussion on future plans for S&S and AHP(B)**

The whole day is free, with donations towards costs welcome.