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Counselling Psychology in the UK: a critical-humanistic perspective

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In this broad analysis of the history, current state and future prospects of Counselling Psychology as a distinct branch of the Psychology discipline, we first describe how Counselling Psychology emerged historically, and we then review the ways in which Counselling Psychology offers something quite distinct from the mainstream discipline, and which could even begin to resemble a kind of genuinely '*critical* psychology'. We offer a nine-point 'prospectus' setting out the value of Counselling Psychology, focusing in particular on its specifically *humanistic* contributions within Psychology; we also consider its limitations. We urge that non-defensive and engaged attention be given to serious critiques of the psychological therapies, and we advocate ongoing, genuinely critical engagement with such challenges, such that an authentically critical-radical Counselling Psychology might become a genuine possibility.

Keywords: Counselling Psychology; history; professional identity; critical perspectives; future prospects

Merging psychological and political rationales is unavoidable …
(Prilleltensky & Fox, 2007, p. 2)

Introduction: personal

We began to conceive of this article when asked to show where Counselling Psychology sits in relation to the field of critical psychology (House & Feltham, 2015). While it therefore carries some sense of being a *defence* of Counselling Psychology, a more important task for us in this article is to show the ways in which Counselling Psychology has great potential for taking forward the historic task of Humanistic Psychology in its important goal of *humanizing* the Psychology discipline. We both have a long-standing relation to *Humanistic* Psychology, albeit with different emphases, though we are far from being mainstream or 'on-message' psychologists; and our own critical thinking is not necessarily aligned with 'mainstream' critical psychology. Our contribution might therefore be considered a form of *critical-humanistic* counselling psychology. We also think it highly relevant

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for humanistic practitioners of every hue to be aware of those parts of the Psychology field which are the potential allies of Humanistic Psychology, as it is surely hopeful that humanistic values and practices are having some purchase on the mainstream, and are not wholly confined to the healthy counter-cultural 'fringe' (Mowbray, 1995, chapter 27).

Introduction: historical roots

Counselling Psychology (hereafter CP) in Britain developed out of what had been a Psychology field dominated by a 'modernist', positivistic worldview. It began when a groundswell of *Clinical* Psychology practitioners wished to move away from the medical models of treatment that had been dominating much of their practice, and the separate development of 'Counselling-"sans"-Psychology' hosted by the then British Association for Counselling (BAC) prompted some with psychology degrees to seek recognition for their counselling activities within the British Psychological Society (BPS). CP can then be seen, at least in part, as a reaction to the mechanistic approach of traditional psychological approaches.

Before discussing the precise roots of Counselling *Psychology*, we need to trace some of the developments of the closely related counselling field. The near origins of counselling in the UK are to be found in the introduction from the USA of person-centred training to the Universities of Keele and Reading in 1970 (for a fuller discussion of CP's origins in Britain, see Feltham, 1995; Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010). The person-centred approach of Carl Rogers (or PCA, as it is often known) had its own origins in the 1940s, and became part of the Humanistic Psychology and human potential movement based in California. A line of theoretical descent can be traced from the psychologist William James through to the famed humanistic psychologists Abraham Maslow, Rollo May, Carl Rogers and others. Counselling in both the USA and the UK should also be seen as blossoming in the context of the 1960s counter-cultural movement generally (Grogan, 2013; House, Kalisch, & Maidman, 2013). The slightly longer roots of counselling and related trends include a philanthropic tradition in Britain in the twentieth century, leading to the formation of the social work profession, which contained elements of psychodynamic casework. Voluntary organizations like the Samaritans, Alcoholics Anonymous and the National Marriage Guidance Council (which became Relate in 1988) also had diverse influences on the formation of counselling. The arrival of psychoanalysis in Britain in the early twentieth century had spawned the derivatives of psychoanalytic psychotherapy and psychodynamic counselling, and the post-war construction of the welfare state was marked by the 1948 creation of the National Health Service (NHS), which gradually came to host some elements of psychotherapy and Clinical Psychology.

The British Association for Counselling (BAC) has its origins in 1970, eventually becoming the British Association for Counselling *and Psychotherapy* (BACP) in 2000. From about 1970 onwards, counselling services grew organically and haphazardly in the voluntary sector, but also in higher education, primary care, the corporate sector and in private practice (Aldridge, 2014). During this time, resistance to counselling came from a number of quarters, including the medical profession, some sociologists, the general public and also the press. Counselling was regarded by many as an unnecessary American import – perhaps as a somewhat laughable 'touchy-feely' threat to the British 'stiff upper lip'. In fact, this reaction was

probably fuelled more by the humanistic therapies – the PCA, Gestalt, transactional analysis (TA), primal therapy, encounter groups – than by psychodynamic counselling, which was often scorned more for its perceived exaggeration of the determining effect of early childhood hurts. Those who instigated the push for CP as a distinct subdiscipline of Psychology were members of the British Psychological Society (BPS), who were also active within the BACP and were eager to see the BPS adopting (or reclaiming) this important new response to perceived human need. The BPS Counselling Psychology Section was duly founded in the early 1990s.

Most counselling training has tended to focus on theoretically specific approaches (Feltham, 1997) – the PCA, psychodynamic, Gestalt, TA, integrative, existential, the Egan approach, etc. – with additional modules typically drawn from the personal development/self-awareness field, developmental theory, professional and ethical themes, skills practice and supervision. Often, a 'social contexts' module is found, mainly sensitizing trainees to pertinent factors of race/diversity and culture, feminism, sexuality, disability, religion and class. The influential PCA is usually explicitly anti-diagnosis and anti-psychopathology in character, but other approaches vary on these issues.

The core of all counselling theories emphasizes the individual's experience, her past, feelings, thoughts, relationships and goals. Although most trainee cohorts typically have over 80 per cent female membership, oddly little attention is given to feminist theory and therapy. There is also little attention paid to relevant radical counselling or social theories such as Newman's social therapy (Holzman, Newman, & Strong, 2004), Smail's social materialist approach (Moloney, 2013; Smail, 2005) or Jackins' re-evaluation co-counselling (e.g. Kauffman & New, 2004). Fractionally more attention may be paid on doctorate programmes in CP, but the main distinction between counselling and CP programmes is the latter's emphasis on research methods and practice, justifying the scientist-practitioner (Corrie & Callahan, 2000) or preferred *reflective practitioner* identity (Schön, 1983).

Clinical Psychology, inaugurated in Britain in the 1950s, was firmly rooted in the scientific tradition as represented by behavioural experiments and behaviour therapy. From its beginning, CP was critical of Clinical Psychology, and forged a new and distinct identity within the BPS. It could be said that psychology had now come home. Fascination with the human psyche had attracted many potential students to Psychology who had, however, been repelled by its image as overly focused on statistics, experiments involving pigeons and rats, and disembodied 'cognitive processes'. CP appeared to honour the reality of subjectivity, relationality, emotional expression and the body, and to broaden Psychology's focus beyond the behavioural and the cognitive.

What Counselling Psychology offers that is radically different

In recent years, the British NHS has seen the growing influence of the medical model for 'treating' behavioural 'disorders' within the professional framework of Clinical Psychology (e.g. Mollon, 2009; Newnes, 2014). At a time when a number of writers from the British Clinical Psychology profession are now questioning whether CP should not be collapsed into, and assimilated by, Clinical Psychology (e.g. Kinderman, 2009), it is important to articulate what is distinctive about CP, and why, even if it currently falls well short of the kind of radical praxis that more critical/radical

psychologists would wish to see, the continued independent existence of CP is worth advocating, as in our view it represents one of the best hopes for progressively transforming professional Psychology *from the inside* towards a more human(e), radically informed praxis.

Advocating Counselling Psychology

Below, we offer nine plausible arguments for CP being radically different from the mainstream Psychology discipline (which includes Clinical Psychology).

1. Counselling Psychology straddles the fields of counselling/therapy and Psychology, such that, at its best, Counselling Psychology can weave together into a potent therapeutic offer and practice what is best in both fields. Both fields (i.e. mainstream Psychology and CP) have a body of thought which is critically sceptical of the other, Psychology being critical of the talking therapies because of their alleged flakiness and lack of rigour and evidence base, and counselling/therapy being critical of Psychology because of the latter's tendency to privilege mechanistically reductive, fragmented ontologies and practices, and its associated 'objectivism' and down-playing of the subjective and the experiential. In a pluralist universe that values and positively welcomes diversity and even conflict (Cooper & McLeod, 2010; Samuels, 1997), that CP is the site of such stark ideological conflicts arguably drags counselling psychologists into thinking far more deeply and critically about their praxis. At the very least, it seems unlikely that a field riven by such paradigmatic conflict is going to rest on its laurels and lapse into professionalized complacency. Our own experience of teaching and examining CP doctoral trainees in university settings certainly bears out the dynamic and searching nature of the professional journeys on which these Counselling Psychology students and trainees are embarked.

2. Counselling Psychology is a way of institutionally humanizing at least one area of the Psychology field when the discipline of Psychology is (usually accurately) challenged by critical psychologists for its positivistic, pathologizing, objectivist worldview. On reading books like the *Handbook of counselling psychology* (Woolfe, Strawbridge, Douglas, & Dryden, 2010) and Milton's collection (2010a), one is left with quite a strong sense that, while of course there is the usual professionalized fare, there is also a substantially counter-cultural ethos within CP, with many of its practitioners challenging the ideological legitimacy of mainstream Psychology. In this sense, CP arguably has a quite crucial contribution to make in the ideological struggles raging for the heart of Psychology as a disciplinary practice in late-modern culture (e.g. Parker, 2007, 2014). A key issue for Counselling Psychologists is how they can simultaneously nurture the critical humanistic ethos within Psychology and resist any re-institutionalizing pressures, some of which are perhaps already evident in Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) membership/regulation.

3. Through its theoretical commitments, Counselling Psychology at least offers the possibility of a flexible, pluralistic approach to therapeutic help (but see Moller, 2011), which is certainly a necessary (if by no means a sufficient) condition for a genuinely radical-critical praxis. Cooper and McLeod's (2010) important landmark study on pluralism in counselling and psychotherapy is a key text, though not without its

problems (House, 2011; Samuels, 1997). CP advocates a genuine openness to a broad range of influences, and as long as this does not degenerate into a soggily expedient, principle-lite approach, there are many creative possibilities here for critical psychology values to infiltrate the CP field.

Indeed, there are signs in the UK that this might already be happening. This certainly is not the stuff of overnight revolutions, but it does seem to signify a steadily growing acknowledgement of critical psychology concerns within CP, and in our view, all radicals should both welcome and encourage these trends. Key questions here are, what can and should be embraced by such pluralism, and what if anything may be deemed unacceptable or inconvenient? For example, elements of evolutionary psychology inform approaches such as compassion-focused therapy, which are essentially humanistic, and yet anxiety about anything with Darwinian or deterministic associations sometimes leads to biological perspectives being silenced by more politically oriented therapies, where the 'blank slate' model of humanity tends to be privileged. We should perhaps note here that the neglected work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) affords the opportunity to bring *the body* back into psychology and therapy, without necessarily lapsing into a crude biologistic materialism (e.g. Felder & Robbins, 2011; Feltham, 2008; *Self & Society*, 2014a).

On the other hand, Rowan (2014) argues that Humanistic Psychology necessarily includes transpersonal psychology, and in the latter discipline human beings can be considered 'eternal beings', a position that is hard to reconcile with many scientific, political and existentialist views. Quite how 'pluralistic' can one be? Is a multi-dialogical approach practical? 'Where are the lines, and who draws them?' becomes a key question here (assuming that lines are necessary and unavoidable, which assumption can, of course, also be questioned).

4. Counselling Psychology has some limited potential to be a less 'professionalized' practice compared to mainstream Psychology, so at least there is the prospect of a progressive 'post-professional' practice beginning to emerge from within the CP field (cf. Feltham, 2009; House, 2010; Illich, 1977), which seems significantly less likely in the more clinically oriented and professionalized field of Clinical Psychology (Newnes, 2014). Yet many counselling psychologists have a strong antipathy, as well as a perhaps equally strong ambivalence, towards the statutory regulation of their work and the regimes of surveillance to which they are thereby subjected, and any reading of the theory and practice of CP will indicate that there are potential spaces for incipient post-professionalism that is almost entirely absent in what is arguably an overly professionalized mainstream Psychology. Although it is verging on being a dirty open secret, we cannot ignore the economics involved here: specifically, a secure post as an NHS counselling psychologist, for example, comes with a salary range that usually far exceeds remuneration found in other sectors or in private practice. Perhaps practitioners engaged in statutory sector work are unlikely to be the most radical.

Denis Postle's recent work on what he terms the psyCommons, or what he calls 'giving psychology away', is also of considerable relevance here (Postle, 2012, 2013; see also Feltham, 2012). According to Postle, counsellors and psychotherapists have been attempting to 'enclose' the domain of human relations in the same way that psychiatrists have done with so-called 'mental illness'. Thus, for Postle, the psyCommons is a 'rich resource of "ordinary wisdom" …, the universe of rapport

– of relationships between people – through which we navigate daily life' (Postle, 2013), and yet which is being placed under serious and recurrent threats by what he would see as self-interested professionalizing attempts to wall off the rich ecology of everyday, 'ordinary' psy common sense. Certainly, the argument is very compelling that the professionalizing of the therapies actually contributes to the loss of the very everyday wisdom and practices that Postle wishes to protect, and so, at worst, becomes a self-reinforcing, self-interested process which is far from being in the common cultural interest.

In a direct challenge to these tendencies (cf. House & Totton, 2011; Mowbray, 1995), Postle wants us to 'turn away from protecting the enclosures and towards sustaining and enhancing the "ordinary wisdom" and "shared power" of the psyCommons' (Postle, 2013). It is certainly very difficult not to construe the BPS's support for the state regulation of the psychological therapies as a prime example of what Postle is highlighting, and for current purposes, perhaps the key question is the extent to which CP can stand for different, 'post-professionalizing' values that support Postle and his colleagues' position, and which reflexively seek to champion the everyday and the non-expert over colonizing professionalized discourses. Certainly, the jury is still very much out on this issue, but our experience is that there is a modicum (if not a critical mass) of radical counter-cultural allegiance within CP that might at least be open to these important cultural arguments.

5. Counselling Psychology explicitly embraces a non-medical model ontology. Certainly, British CP's focus on well-being and flourishing rather than on 'psychopathology' and deficit is well illustrated by Milton, Craven, and Coyle (2010) and Milton (2012), and CP in Britain (certainly in its more critical incarnations) is radically anti-reductionist, 'post-individualist' and anti-medical model in a way that will be conducive to most if not all critical psychologists – as Milton et al. (2010) put it, 'querying the categorisation of distress' (p. 62). For Milton et al., modernist therapy, which focuses on 'altering behaviour patterns and belief systems', has major shortcomings (p. 64), not least the way in which an inadvertent circularity means that 'the therapist finds the "disorder" that they hypothesise to be there and attempts to impose this on the client in a form of intellectual colonialism' (p. 65; cf. Parker, Georgaca, Harper, McLaughlin, & Stowell-Smith, 1995). One consequence of this is to 'divert attention from socio-cultural factors in the genesis of psychological distress' (p. 63). CP is one of the very few branches of mainstream Psychology that champions an explicitly anti-medical model, non-pathologizing therapy approach, and this should be a source of support and celebration for all Humanistic Psychologists, therapists and critical psychologists. At the same time, some critical scepticism should perhaps be brought to bear on areas of the 'psychologization' of, for example, psychosomatic practice and theory, where the client can feel blamed (and may suffer) if she or he does not invest sufficient faith in, for example, overcoming cancer by psychological means (Diedrich, 2005).

6. Counselling Psychology tends to encourage a (humanistic) openness to different approaches and practices. We have already referred to this openness, and it seems that any branch of Psychology that explicitly privileges an authentically open engagement with a broad range of ideas (which includes, crucially, a willingness to

question and even 'deconstruct' prevailing orthodoxies [Parker, 1999]) must be potentially fertile ground for radical ideas and perspectives to take root and, eventually, flourish. Again, Humanistic Psychology and all it has stood for over the decades surely deserves much credit for this openness. Thus, as the many contributions to House et al. (2013) indicate, there certainly exists a consistent, if very varied, critical tradition in Humanistic Psychology, which strongly advocates a radical openness to experience and to difference. It therefore comes as no surprise, perhaps, that CP itself has an explicitly humanistic ethos. Indeed, for us, a basic humanistic impulse of openness – notwithstanding the strong post-structuralist critique of Humanistic Psychology's notions of a unitary 'self', its alleged privileging of individualism, its apolitical non-commitments and so on (e.g. Henriques, Holloway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1998) – is a necessary condition (if not a sufficient one) for genuinely critical ideas to be received, acknowledged and maturely thought about with a minimum of defensiveness and preconception.

For all humanism's alleged shortcomings, then, we maintain that an explicitly *humanistic* CP offers fertile ground for critical psychological ideas and practices to be received and take root, and the key importance of this openness should not be underestimated. Openness operates not only at a theoretical level but in innovative training and practice settings, where a feminism-inspired commitment to authentic, emotion-honouring relationship (Robb, 2007) and a relational-depth approach (Knox, Murphy, Wiggins, & Cooper, 2013; Mearns & Cooper, 2005) can join forces. Humanistic Psychology may, indeed, critique critical psychology for the latter's arguably sometimes wordy, even mystifying tendencies.

7. Counselling Psychology has the potential to embrace a strong social justice orientation, especially in the USA, which makes it particularly amenable to CP practices. In the USA, CP has been far more proactive with regard to multiculturalism, having been 'at the forefront of efforts to increase representation of counselling psychologists of color and/or nondominant cultures in the field' (Helms, 2003, p. 307). And while multiculturalists have consistently taken strong positions against oppression, inequality and exploitation (ibid.; James & Prilleltensky, 2002), Helms expresses the ambivalence shared by many radical psychologists when she writes that 'it is not clear … that communitarian social justice is workable to any great extent in a capitalistic society' (2003, p. 312), so articulating the age-old 'reform vs revolution' conundrum that faces all radicals working both in and against the system (see, for example, Parker, 2007).

In the USA, there have been consistent calls for CP to embrace social justice-oriented work (e.g. Ivey & Collins, 2003), but a decade ago there had been little discussion about what such work might actually look like (Goodman et al., 2004). Goodman et al. proposed a set of principles from feminist and multicultural counselling theories which counselling psychologists should surely consider in the course of social justice work, including ongoing self-examination, the sharing of power, giving voice, facilitating consciousness-raising, building on strengths and providing clients with the tools to work for social change (ibid., p. 793). We also need to be aware of the professional obstacles that counselling psychologists will meet in doing social justice work, and it is to the credit of the BPS that a social justice group has recently been established (see also Cutts, 2013).

Finally, critical community psychologist and eminent American academic Isaac Prilleltensky has been a very strong advocate of social justice and activist orientations, and of engagements with issues of power and ethics, in a substantial body of deeply impressive writings (e.g. Prilleltensky, 1994, 2008; Prilleltensky & Fox, 2007; Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2003), albeit writing more from a Community Psychology perspective. For Prilleltensky, 'power is never political or psychological; it is always both' (Prilleltensky, 2008, p. 116), yet Psychology 'lack[s] a framework for combining psychological and political power for the purpose of social change' (ibid.), and his development of the fruitful post-positivist notion of 'psychopolitical validity' is one response to this lacuna. For Prilleltensky and Nelson (2002), 'counselling psychologists should engage with clients in a collaborative support process in which therapists and clients share power' (p. 87). Isack and Hook (1995) also provide an important source here.

On reading Prilleltensky's impressive scholarly writings, and bearing in mind the rather invisible nature of Community Psychology (in the UK at least), one is left wondering whether there might be a fertile rapprochement, or even merger, of CP and Community Psychology, not least because many of the features of a radical-activist Community Psychology (around its active engagement with the cultural and the political) are precisely what a CP that is being true to its self-professed theoretical and ideological commitments should be engaged in. Indeed, there is much potential within Psychology for building a synergistic alliance between Humanistic Psychology, CP and Community Psychology, such that a critical mass of radicalism can take root, and even begin significantly to impact mainstream Psychology thinking. Might we even hope that some progressively minded educational institution could devise a practitioner programme in 'Critical Action Psychology', which would combine the best radical-critical streams from Humanistic, Community, Counselling, and 'Critical' Psychology? There are certainly signs that in some contexts, like the German one, Community Psychology remains a meaningful force, aligned with a still emerging counselling profession (Nestmann, Engle, & Sickendiek, 2013). Kagan, Tindall, and Robinson (2010) and Watkins and Schulman (2008) provide further international examples.

8. Counselling Psychology encourages explicit engagement with multicultural perspectives and difference, and with feminism and racism, especially within US Counselling Psychology (see, for example, Goodman et al., 2004; Vera & Speight, 2003), with an attendant potential for transcending the narcissistic Western individualism for which individualized therapy has been powerfully criticized (e.g. Cloud, 1998; Wallach & Wallach, 1983). CP explicitly acknowledges the crucial importance of difference and uniqueness (as opposed to the nomothetic, normalizing/standardizing mentality of much of mainstream Psychology), and so again, there is considerable 'potential space' for incursions into, and subversion of, the prevailing Eurocentric ideology and 'regimes of truth' that dominate mainstream Psychology.

There has also certainly been attention given to issues of feminist engagements, racism and sexual diversity in US CP (e.g. Moradi, 2012; Moradi, Subich, & Phillips, 2002; Neville & Carter, 2005), with, for example, themes like the fusion of feminism and social justice being actively explored and theorized (Moradi, 2012, pp. 1134–1136). There is also little doubt that the strong challenge to the 'psychopathologizing' mentality (Parker et al., 1995 – see above) that CP claims to embrace is genuine

and informed (see, for example, Larsson, Brooks, & Loewenthal, 2012; Milton, 2012; Milton et al., 2010; Parpottas, 2012).

9. Counselling Psychology's ontology gives it the potential to connect with the radical linking of modernityllate capitalism and emotionallpsychological suffering, as depicted in the work of (for example) David Michael Levin (1987a, 1987b), Tod Sloan (1995, 1996), Colin Feltham (2007) and Paul Moloney (2013). Sloan, for example, shows how capitalist industrialization affects family life, personal experience and intimate relationships, with a penetrating analysis of modernity's impact on the modern psyche, understanding personality development socio-historically, and the mass suffering of the modern self systematically generated by/in late capitalism. Drawing on Habermas, Sloan also highlights the ways in which individuals 'disconnect' from community norms and so commonly face a complex, challenging world without appropriate support systems. The rationale and conceptual tools that Sloan's book *Damaged life* provides are relevant not merely to Community Psychology – helping to empower people to grow through and beyond the psychological ruins of late modernity – but also to a critically aware, radicalized Counselling Psychology. And these are also core concerns for many humanistic psychologists, of course, working at the self/society interface.

Sloan's other major text, *Life choices* (1996), might be of even more relevance to CP, as it can be described as a counter-cultural 'anti-guide' to the kind of augmentations to client decision-making that are standard fare for CP. For Sloan, mainstream Psychology is not at all useful in helping us understand what is involved in major life choices, with individuals commonly making decisions that tend to reinforce the socio-cultural structures that were initially instrumental in the creation of their dilemmas (cf. David Smail's work here, e.g. Smail, 2005; see also Moloney, 2013; Rowe, Gordon & Newnes, 2014b).

More recently still, Verhaeghe (2014) shows how social change has led to a psychic crisis of late modernity, altering the very way in which we think about ourselves, and with social change having a profound impact on mental health, and how we define our associated 'mental disorders' (cf. Levin, 1987a, 1987b). Verhaeghe exposes to critical Lacanian scrutiny the modern, alienating 'pay-for-performance mentality', with its pressure to achieve and be happy, and which, he argues, is generating a warped view of the self, disorientation and even despair, with people lonelier than ever before, and love increasingly difficult to find as people struggle to find meaning in their lives. Verhaeghe directly links these alienating psycho-cultural developments to the effects of three decades of neoliberal free-market forces, privatization and the relationship between our 'engineered' society and personal identity. As Sloan put it nearly two decades earlier, 'Could it be that societal modernization is linked to increased emotional suffering on a broad scale? … Could one define a set of socio-political strategies that would address effectively the problematic features of modernity?' (Sloan, 1996, p. vii; see also the recent *Guardian* press Open Letter on the mental health effects of austerity policies in the UK, House & 441 others, 2015).

Moreover, such a critique of modernity inevitably leads also to a consideration of *post*modernity (e.g. Combs & Freedman, 2012; *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 1998; House, 2010), and the way in which our theories of knowledge, truth and praxis will also need to be fundamentally re-founded in an era that moves beyond

late capitalism and modernity, and its associated worldview. Milton (2010b, p. xxiii), for example, foregrounds CP's postmodern, multi-modal and holistic ontology, with its seeking of *understanding* rather than explanation and universal 'truths', and its relational and dialogical nature (p. xxiv). Certainly, the considerable literatures on narrative therapy, social constructionism and poststructuralist critique, both within and beyond the counselling (psychology) literature, can all be seen as first steps towards such an urgently needed paradigm shift.

Counselling Psychology builds on but cries out for more research and critical thinking

CP, along with its non-HCPC regulated, non-BPS older sibling Counselling, has decisively broken from the norms of Clinical Psychology by pursuing an agenda of qualitative research. In principle, both quantitative and qualitative methodologies are available to doctoral students, academics and research-active, reflexive practitioners, but in our experience it has become the norm for qualitative approaches like interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) to be used (see, for example, Hanley, Lennie, & West, 2013; Todres, 2007). Such small-scale, in-depth methodologies, while still not universally respected within Psychology or academia, have gained considerable ground. Honouring the human experience at the heart of CP, qualitative methodology is able to facilitate examination of nuances of inner, emotional, interpersonal, intercultural and spiritual experiences. Alongside this trend, *practice-based evidence* has made some significant inroads within Psychology and its professions (Fox, 2011), successfully inverting the hegemony of objectivist research and the dominance of mass surveys and randomized control trials.

Rather disappointingly, much slower to make a significant impact in our field has been the application of 'non-empirical' critical thinking to counselling theory and practice (Feltham, 2010). As welcome as counselling-specific qualitative research is, it can also become a ritual means of merely satisfying doctoral requirements and academic publishing pressures (Brooks, 2013), and we commend a greater mix of empirical research methodology with rigorous critical thinking in CP texts, training and practice (cf Cooper, 2013). One route into this might be Heidegger's (1947/2008) exploration of what humanism is variously taken to mean and how authentic individual thinking – as opposed to technical, erudite or expropriated thinking – points to experienced rather than theoretical humanism. Respect for critical humanistic thinking in its own right and not as a mere preamble to qualitative studies in CP would be very welcome.

Taking stock: unfinished business?

In this article, we have focused on the critical distinctiveness and promise of CP, positively promoting its humanistic contributions within Psychology and suggesting some necessary or possible ways forward. We have also underlined some of the strengths of a pluralistic epistemology and praxis. However, it remains to be seen just what can be contained and expanded within a CP discipline, and what should be maintained or changed in professional or post-professional practice. The critical aspect of any theoretical development of CP must include a better, honest analysis of criticisms of the whole Psychology discipline, including ex-clients' negative feedback (e.g. Sands, 2000), non-Psychology academics' critiques (Epstein, 2006; Furedi,

2004; Grogan, 2013) and intra-disciplinary critiques (Adams, 2014; Feltham, 2013; Moloney, 2013; Newnes, 2014). Without engaged attention to serious critiques, CP can easily be dismissed as happy to wallow in comfortably radical-sounding rhetoric but averse to confrontation with its institutionalized defences (and economic self-protectionism), and to the actual changes required in practice as indicated by critiques. Such business may, of course, never ultimately be finishable, but without ongoing, genuinely critical engagement we would caution, finally, that CP might be fatally discredited as a discipline. That would be a real shame, in our view. If a progressive Humanistic Psychology influence can be assimilated by Counselling Psychology, we hope and believe that CP can only have a positive future.

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