

An overview of the conference*

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As chair of the Association for Humanistic Psychology in Britain (AHPb), I was delighted to welcome everyone to our one-day conference held in London on 7 October 2017. The theme was 'Expanding a Humanistic Vision for a 21st Century Psychology', and the event doubled as the launch of a new book, *Humanistic psychology: Current trends and future prospects*, edited by Richard House, David Kalisch and Jennifer Maidman. Published by Routledge in August, the book showcases the Humanistic Psychology of today in all its richness and diversity.

This important event brought together some of the authors to talk about the future of Humanistic Psychology and to raise important questions for our time. It was hoped that Derek Lawton (Chair of UKAHPP – the United Kingdom Association for Humanistic Psychology Practitioners) would co-chair the event with Richard House, a recent former co-editor of *Self & Society* and member of the AHPb Board. Unfortunately due to personal circumstances Derek was unable to attend. Stuart Morgan-Ayrs, as a member of both AHPb and the UKAHPP, took the role of conference co-chair. He said that it was vital that the two organizations work together, and welcomed this opportunity as a sign of things to come.

The speakers were invited to give their own particular slant on the event's umbrella title. The keynote presentation was given by Professor Maureen O'Hara (Saybrook, California). Other keynote speakers included Jill Hall (Independent Practitioners Network), David Wasdell (Apollo-

Gaia Project), Robin Shohet (an early Independent Therapists Network/IPN pioneer), and Dina (Zohar) Glouberman (founder of Skyros Holidays), all of whom are inspiring and challenging thinkers in the field of psychology in general, and in Humanistic Psychology in particular.

Themes covered included Humanistic Psychology and activism, future self as living entity, expanding the humanistic paradigm for the twenty-first century context, Humanistic Psychology 'outside the box', and visioning our humanistic future – a rich mixture of the 'self' and 'society' dialectic that is at the core of Humanistic Psychology as a genuinely progressive psychology for the current era.

As most of the speakers have addressed their themes in their contributions to this issue of the journal, I will highlight what I personally felt to be significant. I found all of the presentations to be illuminating and expressive of the need for, and importance of, Humanistic Psychology.

Maureen O'Hara – 'Expanding a Humanistic Vision for a 21st Century Psychology'

Maureen invited everyone to choose a colour on a screen and tell the person next to them what the colour evoked. I found this to be an effective exercise in helping with being present and relating.

She acknowledged two mentors: Professor Irene Manton and Carl Rogers. Their influences were in the direction of a different paradigm to that of knowing things objectively.

Maureen is a member of the International Futures Forum (IFF) whose aim is to understand and

to shift from a micro to a macro perspective. This is in the context of our difficulty in grappling with our existence due to our lack of knowing of ourselves. When the culture breaks down, modal psychology breaks down. Then there are two possibilities: collapse or transformation.

Humanistic Psychology needs to own the transformative story which the world is looking for. We need to find a way to another stage of social evolution. We need to develop psychological and cultural literacy. Feelings are important, and so too are poetry, art and music. From these elements, a hybrid psychology is emerging that can be learned in psychotherapy, or in a church or mosque.

These principles were fundamental to the IFF in helping with a highly successful project in Falkirk, Scotland, in which the need was for a new identity, following the withdrawal of British Petroleum from the region. The Forum aimed to hear a deeper imaginative mythic level of awareness. The outcome was that various communities, including children, teachers and unemployed people, created Helix Park featuring 'Kelpies' – sculptures in the shape of horses or waves.

This kind of creativity will happen as long as we can get out of the box and be with psychosis, terror etc. Then people on the margins will have a chance to be heard in a new way that wasn't happening previously in a broken system.

Jill Hall – 'Holding the Vision of what It Is To Be a Whole Human Being as We Embrace the Digital Age'

Jill talked of the vibrant and alive roots of the Association for Humanistic Psychology (AHP). Her focus then was on our roots and the assumption of flowering of the self. It remains vital that, with the expansion of artificial intelligence, AHP holds true to its original vision. We need to adapt creatively without losing the essence of Humanistic Psychology in holding its vision of what it is to be a human being. How do we stay in touch with the whole of our being – what we each are, and are becoming?

Jill developed her values out of her own personal

experiences. As a child in 1930s apartheid South Africa, it was her experience that those around her didn't know how to be. However, in her fear of isolation she would have to fit in. She knew she had to be embodied on the earth. She knew also that even if she wasn't loved, she could love. She knew that love was inborn in us.

A later knowing came from experiential learning and the understanding that we have to take full responsibility. There were no victims. There were some casualties, but it was transformative. Being good was replaced with being truthful, especially with oneself. Jill also learned that nothing can give us a sense of another person in the same way as face-to-face encounter.

Our culture is now frenetic, and we are 'blinking out' more. In this digital age creativity is as important as ever. We need to revise real connection. We need to have the courage to be. The actualization of each one of us will help with our interconnectedness.

David Wasdell 'Frontiers of a Paradigm Shift: Transforming Humanistic Psychology for Tomorrow's World.'

One of the key questions that has always informed David Wasdell's path-breaking work is, 'Of what are we unconscious, in everything we do?'. What we learn from David is that Humanistic Psychology will be substantially denuded unless we bring the best of psychodynamic thinking to inform and cast light on it. In his talk (which is not reproduced in this symposium), David brought these ideas to the vexed issue of climate change - the implication being that unless we open up to these collectively unconscious, pre and peri-natal dynamics in relation to our despoliation of the planet, we're all going to be gonners - and much sooner than we remotely realise.

Robin Shohet – 'Outside the Box'

The biggest threat to humanity is revenge. We need forgiveness, and to develop a healthier way of relating with the world around us. If we can get rid of resentment, love remains.

We create splits, which are re-enacted, in order to survive. Our thinking is all about me-me-me and

survival. The left brain dissects. It dominates more than ever, but the right brain sees the bigger picture. They need to work together.

Herein lies the value of Humanistic Psychology, which is more about the right brain; thinking out of the box and revisiting. We need the language of paradox. Trauma can be a catalyst for an awakening. Healing of trauma means working with the illusion of control. Working with PTSD, on the other hand, is only working with symptoms.

We must ask: What part of me is disturbed? Who has the problem? Who is the 'I' that has the problem? The idea of exclusion is a dualistic concept. How can the mind grasp something bigger than self? Ultimately there is nowhere to go. The notion of a whole separate 'I' is an illusion. There is something much bigger than the separate individual.

Robin was honest and open as he shared some personal experiences to illustrate, and he invited others to share theirs.

Zohar [Dina] Glouberman – ‘Your Own Humanistic Future: A Visualization Experience’

Humanistic Psychology, with its premise of being open, authentic and non-authoritarian, together with creativity, is the binding principle of her life. Skyros was based on all the principles of Humanistic Psychology. People come there and are able to be themselves.

Why do people want to live in boxes? Here today people are expressing their anxieties. We need to bring humanity and community back.

She asked us to choose a value. Imagine ourselves how we saw ourselves in the future. What did we want? In that future time, how will we feel? She then led a visualization. We closed our eyes and imagined being in a space vehicle propelling ourselves into the future and returning in five years' time. How do we feel after five years? At the end of the exercise we told the person next to us about our value.

Dina asked us to say what values Humanistic Psychology brought to mind. The following values were shared:

Positive regard	Respect
Optimism	Power equality
Subjectivity	Embodiment
Presence	Humour
Encounter	Spirituality
Genuineness	Congruence
Authenticity	Development
Creativity	Social Responsibility
Love	Uniqueness
Openness	Gentleness
Phenomenological	Self-responsibility
Beyond measurement	Relational
In the moment	Transcendent
Experiential	Self-actualization
Richness	Stepping forward to meet the tree
Empathic	Gratitude
Awareness	Robust
Curiousness	Fluid
Expansion	
Radical autonomy	

Plenary

I took the chair in place of John Rowan who, due to ill health, was unable to take this role. However, John arrived to great applause in the afternoon, and joined the panel of speakers and other contributors to the book: Maureen O'Hara, Robin Shohet, David Wasdell, Alexandra Chalfont, Richard House, Jennifer Maidman and Steve Pritzker.

Questions related to issues raised in the book: evidence-based therapy, e.g. CBT, and how to promote Humanistic Psychology.

The order of responses given below does not reflect the order on the day.

John Rowan – Therapy could not be given a mark. Much research is quantitative. There has to be qualitative research, which currently is not respected. He emphasized that the therapist has to be authentic. What does this mean and how do you measure it?

Dina Glouberman – Who is the 'I'? Any measurement has to incorporate this.

Maureen O'Hara – She referred to Art Bohart and Larry Leitner who found that empirically validated treatments were the wrong paradigm for humanistic psychological approaches (see Bohart et al., 2010).

There are signs of dissatisfaction with IAPT, with the outcome showing people insufficiently healed with an 'off you go' attitude, resulting in a revolving-door syndrome which merely boosts the recorded number of those treated.

Richard House – The left brain measures and feels threatened by not being able to measure.

Dina Glouberman – The right brain is free. If the person is watched whilst being creative they feel restricted. Love doesn't look like this.

Jennifer Maidman – Humanistic Psychology features fuzzy logic and is not precise. These aspects refer back to Carl Rogers who said 'these things tend to be helpful'. 'Dare we do away with professionalism?', as originally asked by Carl Rogers back in the early 1970s. What do we want to be? Therapists shouldn't be a cog in the machine, and Humanistic Psychology should remain counter-cultural.

Steve Pritzker – The pharmaceutical industry has vested interests. It wants people to feel the need for medication; hence a resistance to Humanistic Psychology. This situation needs to be challenged.

Audience comment – This speaker said they had to justify Humanistic Psychology in the NHS where quantitative measurement overwhelms the qualitative. It would be good if the future of Humanistic Psychology could be the theme of a workshop. Also, why was nobody much younger than 40 years of age at this conference?

Richard House – 25 or 50 years ago there would have been 500 at an event like this. On this occasion there are 70 or so, with few under the age of 30.

Maureen O'Hara – AHP needs to go to organizations, and volunteer and show that AHP knows how to empower etc.

The plenary was drawn to a close after an exciting and inspiring day which included both the personal and experiential, as well as more theoretical and political contributions.

Music and networking

A considerable number of books were purchased, and new members were recruited to the AHP. At least half of the attendees were not members of

AHP. Several people came from considerable distances (Cumbria, Scotland, France, Israel and the USA and Canada), and made enormous and inspiring efforts to attend.

The event concluded with networking, accompanied by wonderful music provided by Jennifer Maidman and Annie Whitehead (ex Penguin Café Orchestra). 🎵

* *Expanding a Humanistic Vision for a 21st Century Psychology*, Holloway Road Resources Centre, London, Saturday 7 October 2017.



Lucy Scurfield is a psychotherapist and counsellor (UKOP-registered). In 2006 she founded Strong Roots, a registered charity (www.strongroots.org.uk), which is a unique and innovative therapeutic garden project in Norwich that combines psychotherapy with

being in a garden setting. People who attend include those experiencing social exclusion for a variety of reasons. Individuals refer themselves or are referred by both statutory and non-statutory agencies. Important to the development of the project is the support of the Independent Practitioners Network (www.ipnetwork.org.uk) in which Lucy has been an active participant since 2010. She is also the chair of AHPb. Email: lucyscurfield@freeuk.com

Reference

Bohart, A., O'Hara, M., & Leitner, L. (1998). Empirically violated treatments: Disenfranchisement of humanistic and other psychotherapies. *Psychotherapy Research*, 8 (2), 141-157.