

History & Development of Co-Counselling

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Co-counselling was developed by Harvey Jackins in the 1950s and 1960s in Seattle Washington, USA. Harvey's account is that in about 1950 he offered a room in his home to a friend of a friend who had had a nervous breakdown, and that he noticed in this person the effect of sustained emotional discharge of distress on behaviour change. Thereafter he set up a private one-way counselling business called Personal Counselors Inc. He says that, working from scratch, he progressively developed the theory and techniques of emotional discharge in sessions with his clients; and then applied this in training co-counsellors, setting up the first co-counselling network in the Seattle region.

But there were clearly influences. **Dianetics** by L. Ron Hubbard was published in 1950 and became a best seller. Harvey himself told me he was asked by Hubbard to counsel Hubbard's eldest son. We can safely assume not only personal but theoretical acquaintance. Harvey's first theoretical book **The Human Side of Human Beings** published in 1964 had a double aspect. On the one hand it reads like an original statement; on the other hand, for anyone who has studied **Dianetics** carefully, it reads like an elegant distillation and restatement of part of dianetic theory. Not only do the theories overlap, but key words and phrases in the theoretical terminology are identical in both books: Richard Horobin has researched this (unpublished paper available on request).

Dianetic counselling was called auditing. Not only do practical auditing techniques and principles bear relation to practical counselling techniques and principles in co-counselling, but in the early days of dianetics in the 1950s auditors used to co-audit, do reciprocal auditing - and this, I think, must be construed as the precursor to co-counselling. I do not wish to impugn the genuine flavour of originality in Harvey's theoretical and practical work; but the dianetic influence is unmistakable.

There are at least four other sorts of influence. First, the traditional verbal psychotherapies stemming from classical psychoanalysis: Harvey has told how he read some of the books to compare and contrast them with what he was trying out. And the early work of Freud did spotlight the significance of abreaction or emotional discharge. Second, the birth of self-help groups in the late 1940s groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Recovery Inc.,

where the notion of people helping people, of peer support, was clearly expressed. And at the same time, and in accord with same sort of principle, sensitivity training groups and early (Rogerian) encounter groups were being born. Third, the tradition of fundamental, folk-oriented, fervent and cohesive grass-roots religion in the western states: re-evaluation counselling - Harvey's original movement - still today exudes an exclusive, sectarian, fundamentalist, redemptive quality. Fourth, a key political influence: Marxist doctrines of democratic centralism. Harvey had been a member of the communist party, active in labour movements in the north-western states; and after his resignation from the party took over into the organisation of co-counselling the notion of firm central control of theory and policy - with I believe, morally and ideologically unfortunate results.

Harvey's official title for his co-counselling movement was and is today "re-evaluation counselling". He, through his firm Personal Counselors Inc., registered this title legally as a service mark (possible in the USA but not in the UK where you can only register trade marks); then he started to sign pieces of paper to authorise other people to use this title as teachers of re-evaluation counselling. In this way co-counselling spread from Seattle in the late 1960s east to Pennsylvania and south to California. In the early 1970s the number of "authorised" teachers increased dramatically, local re-evaluation counselling communities appeared in many parts of the USA, then in the UK and parts of Europe. The communities were simply networks of people who co-counselled in their own homes regularly and who met from time to time for shorter or longer workshops. Harvey developed guidelines for an organisational structure: the key role was that of Area Reference Person (usually also an authorised teacher) or local community organiser, who had a small committee and who referred on all substantial matters of theory and policy to the International Reference Person, i.e. Harvey Jackins. Personal Counselors Inc. remained a legal and commercial lynch-pin of the whole structure.

The organisational structure was and clearly still is hierarchical. The International Reference Person exercises firm central control over all major developments of theory, practice and organisational policy - with enough genuine and apparent consultation through Reference Persons Workshops, "World Conferences," and other gatherings to make the whole structure humanly palatable. The gains and benefits of this have been: clear statements on theory and policy, good literature dissemination, reasonably sustained and cohesive organisational structures at local, national and international level, a significant rate of growth and expansion, a strong sense of solidarity, mutual support and almost radical fervour at workshop and meetings of co-counsellors within re-evaluation counselling, and a great deal of extremely worthwhile personal, social and political change activity.

The losses and deficits have also been very considerable, and in my view, such as to make the structure unacceptable. Harvey Jackins, like Ron Hubbard within dianetics and scientology, is the final arbiter of what constitutes "correct"

theory. The result is a centralised dogmatism that seriously inhibits in followers the development of autonomous enquiry about fundamental features of the human condition. Re-evaluation counselling has no grasp of a new research paradigm appropriate to a science of persons: it is a movement devoid of any theory of a method of enquiry into the ideas on which it rests. Similarly, basic policies about new directions and developments for the movement stem from Harvey. Thus the impressive radical political thrust of re-evaluation counselling in recent years - its concern with third world politics, with countering oppression of minorities and stereotyped groups, with reaching out to workers in the basic industries and so on, - is limited by the fact, given the dogmatic centralism, that it looks like the march of followers conditioned by their organisation to follow their leader. It tells us a great deal about Harvey's determination to revisit his political past. It does not tell us about the unexercised determination of other autonomous spirits within the movement.

There have been two other ancillary deficits. Firstly, any centralised dogmatism, however ostensibly enlightened, must have a supporting procedure for identifying and disposing of those who exercise their independent human judgment in ways that do not accord with the "correct" view. Hence the history of reevaluation counselling has been flawed by the arbitrary exclusion from its body of many impressive and worthwhile persons who were dismissed as the equivalent of mediaeval heretics. Secondly, other contemporary growth methods have been arrogantly, but naively, dismissed as contradictory, irrelevant, misleading, inadequate and so on. This, of course, has led to a serious restriction on the development of personal growth methods within re-evaluation counselling.

This critique of re-evaluation counselling is important for two reasons. On the one hand it spotlights yet again the tendency for radical personal development methods to be practiced within traditional authoritarian social structures: anyone who has studied the social structure of therapies from Freud on will be familiar with the blend. On the other hand, it explains the more recent development of co-counselling which have occurred entirely outside the re-evaluation counselling set-up and which have sought to avoid some of its more obvious flaws. Before moving on to these developments, however, I must say something about the key concepts underlying re-evaluation counselling.

These concepts are simple and impressive and are as follows. Re-evaluation counselling is committed to the liberation of occluded, human intelligence. This intelligence, when unimpeded, is supremely flexible, and is the capacity to discriminate awarely what is actually going on in every new situation and make an appropriate, creative response. The effective development and exercise of such intelligence is suspended and interrupted when the young human being is emotionally hurt through being oppressed and interfered with. Such distress experiences precipitate a literal, indiscriminate and distorted perception and memory of the distressing situation and a maladaptive response

to it. The repetition of similar distress experiences can lay down a fixed, rigid pattern of maladaptive response which may generalise to a wide range of related situations. We then get compulsive distress-determined behaviour in which there is no discriminating appraisal of what is actually going on, but instead the blind triggering of old inappropriate responses.

The client in re-evaluation counselling seeks to liberate her occluded intelligence through the abreaction or discharge of distress emotions such as grief, fear, anger, embarrassment. These distress emotions are seen as the impediment, the glue, that restricts freely functioning intelligence. Their discharge, through sobbing, trembling, "storming", laughter, liberates the intelligence which they previously occluded and the human being recovers the capacity to discriminate awarely and fully the situation in which the distress originated. Thus, for the client, the discharge of old distress emotion generates spontaneous insight, a re-evaluation of the distressful situation, seeing it as it really was with a grasp of what it has been doing to one's behaviour ever since. Flexible, human intelligence is restored to its normal, healthy functioning. Old, maladaptive and compulsive responses can be abandoned. The person can choose to act awarely with creative adaptation to what is actually going on.

This client work on personal liberation is done on a basis of mutual aid in relation with another person: each takes a turn as both client and counsellor. This is the peer principle - people helping people. It steps quite outside the therapist/patient, professional/layman, expert/incompetent sorts of distinctions. The client is progressively learning to take charge of her feelings and her behaviour, acquiring increased self-determination. The counsellor being outside the reign of the client's distress can enable the client to hold a working direction against the more chronic compulsions.

The above three paragraphs represent, in my view, the core theory and practice of re-evaluation counselling which those of us who have sought to develop co-counselling in autonomous forms have retained as the point of departure. This core is not immaculate but for many of us it has represented in practice a powerful source of growth and change, with significant social and political implications. I will now briefly relate the external history of the emergence of autonomous co-counselling; and then move on to review some of the more central theoretical, practical and organisational lines of departure.

Tom Scheff, Professor of Sociology at the University of California in Santa Barbara, introduced re-evaluation counselling in the UK in the summers of 1970 and 1971. After his 1970 visit a small independent group of co-counsellors met regularly until it was demoralised and knocked out by a psychiatrist who was asked to visit it, observe and comment on it. His comments were too lethal for the group to recover. I attended Tom's training courses in London in the summer of 1971. Before returning to the USA, he deputising for Harvey, asked me to take on the job of local Reference Person and to start teaching re-evaluation counselling. I agreed, not least because it was clear to me that co-counselling exemplified one very powerful way of doing experiential

research, a person-centered sort of research I had already formulated when I founded the Human Potential Research Project at the University of Surrey in 1970.

I duly received Harvey's teaching authorisation, having already started the first indigenous re-evaluation counselling class in October 1971 at the University of Surrey. It was a twenty week evening class, sponsored by the Project, run as part of the adult education program of the university, and cast very lightly in an experiential research mould - experience and enquiry enhancing each other. Through 1972 I ran several further training courses in London and other parts of England, and also introduced re-evaluation counselling to Belgium and France. I thus taught re-evaluation counselling for a year without having met Harvey. It was clear that more than one teacher in Europe was needed, so I organised a prospective teachers' workshop at the University of Surrey in September 1972 and invited Harvey to come over for his first ever European visit and run it, so that I could meet him and so that new teachers could be authorised. Some 10 new teachers were authorised during Harvey's visit. Several further teachers were authorised on my recommendation during the year after Harvey's return. I attended workshops in the USA at the end of 1972 and was asked to become the Regional Reference Person for the UK and Europe.

In this capacity I corresponded with Harvey in the early months of 1973 about the extension and development of re-evaluation counselling in the UK and Europe. It started to become clear to me in this correspondence that he stood for a rigidity about theory and an authoritarianism about organisation and overall policy that I found in principle unacceptable and also curiously discordant with what seemed to me to be clearly entailed by the core theory and practice of re-evaluation counselling. The disagreement on these fundamental issues - issues outlined in the critique in the earlier part of this article - came to a head in the Reference Persons Workshop run by Harvey in the USA in August 1973 which I attended. Immediately thereafter we co-led, in a state of some mutual tension, the very large European workshop at Arundel. The disagreements sharpened through transatlantic correspondence in the last months of 1973. Finally at the end of 1973 Harvey "suspended" me from my teaching and Reference Persons "posts" and proposed quite unacceptable arrangements for an ostensible resolution. I rejected these and resigned from all activity and involvement in re-evaluation counselling in February 1974.

Thereafter I decided to develop co-counselling in quite independent ways. I used the name "reciprocal counselling," wrote and published a manual, and ran many new training courses, especially in Holland, with a continuing training programme at the University of Surrey through the Human Potential Research Project which I had founded there in 1970. Many others, too were disillusioned with re-evaluation counselling - including almost all the first teachers authorised in the UK and Europe in 1972. So 1974 - 1979 saw the emergence of four co-counselling phenomena. First, there was a modest proliferation of species of co-counselling, all rooted in the common core of theory and practice I outlined earlier, both with different names, and with greater or lesser or

no departure from the original model. There was my Reciprocal Counselling, Savitri Shinya's Insight Counselling, John Southgate's Dialectical Peer Counselling, Glyn Seaborn Jones' Reciprocity; and in the USA People's Re-evaluation Counselling in Hartford, Conn., and a version called Self-Directed Counselling in Palo Alto, Calif. There have, of course, been other applications, extensions and offshoots of the co-counselling idea.

Second, there began a modest cottage industry in co-counselling manuals: there was John Southgate's, mine, Rose Evison/Richard Horobin's, the Palo Alto one, and others. This has been and will continue to be, no doubt, an important part of autonomous development: writing a co-counselling manual requires that the author get really clear about what she or he regards as first principles.

Third, independent local communities or networks of co-counsellors began to form. The whole re-evaluation counseling community in Hartford, Conn., USA, became independent as People's Re-evaluation Counselling, with Dency and Tom Sargent playing central roles. Communities were forming in Guildford, Sheffield, then in Hertfordshire, London, Reading, Bath, Nottingham, and other places. Communities formed in various parts of Holland with both regional and national organisation. There were activities in Bremen, Heidelberg, Munster, Cologne. There are now communities in Auckland and Wellington and elsewhere in New Zealand; and, of course, in Dublin, Ireland.

Fourth, Co-counselling International was formed. Dency and Tom Sargent and I met in Guildford in 1974 and put together the basic ideas for CCI, submitted these to others for comment and launched the first CCI workshop in the USA in the Spring of 1975, followed by the first European CCI workshop in the summer of that year, at which workshop CCI became formally launched. The purpose of CCI is to be an international forum for all co-counselling everywhere, for mutual support and for sharing developments in theory, practice and community organisation. It does this through its newsletter and through international workshops, one in the USA and one in Europe every year. It regards as a unifying principle, not the restricting notion of "correct" theory and policy, but the notion of a common method, the method of co-counselling. The CCI guidelines, printed elsewhere in this issue, set out what are currently regarded as shared principles of method and community. For CCI, as for local independent communities, everything about co-counselling - theory, techniques, community organisation - is in principle open to review and revision as a function of cumulative experience and reflection among interacting peers.

As a result of all this autonomous development the tendency has been to drop different sorts of names, such as reciprocal counselling and others, and use the one generic term "co-counselling". So finally I wish to review what I regard as just a few of the main lines of development in autonomous co-counselling.

First at the theoretical level. Co-counselling method can be seen as exemplifying one form of a new research paradigm for research on persons and the human condition. I call this experiential research in which each person is both cosubject and co-researcher, refining shared ideas about persons and the human condition through the crucible of mutually interacting experiences. Co-counsellors are thus co-researchers: their developmental method is also a valid method of enquiry; and in a sense they come of age when they begin to apply their liberated intelligence to the theoretical and practical assumptions in terms of which they are liberating it. What has emerged and will increasingly emerge from this are (a) theoretical restatements of the nature of humans and their condition (e.g. see my **Catharsis in Human Development**); and (b) interesting phenomenologies of what goes on in human attention and energy, in social interaction and community life as persons learn to take more and more charge of their process. (e.g. see Richard Horobin's article in this issue).

Second, at the level of co-counselling practice. Autonomous co-counselling sustains mainstream methods in full but also acknowledges the vital importance of radical body work, where the client is both active and passive, dealing with bodily rigidities of breathing, sound production and of the musculature everywhere. Related to this, of course, is the adoption of deep regression work on birth and umbilical affect - in short the whole realm of primal integration. Complementary to this primal work is a recognition of the transpersonal realities of the human being, dealing through co-counselling with repression and denial of the transcendental, of the human being's potential access to altered states of consciousness; also using co-counselling to affirm and celebrate this charismatic dimension of human reality. Again, celebration generally - as the complement to working on distress - is enjoyed: the celebration of each person's humanity, of its identities and differences with others.

Third, at the level of community organisation. This is the area of a very quiet political revolution, but a quite fundamental one: groups of peers seeking to raise their consciousness above the old and chronic distress of powerlessness to discover how, outside that distress, they can exercise authentic power and make creative decisions **as peers**. Hence the focus on and experimentation with both discussion procedures and decision-making procedures - so as to avoid degenerate, messy and impotent democracy on the one hand, and equally degenerate recourse to arbitrary authoritarianism on the other. This is a political crucible of the greatest importance, since it lays the foundations for acquiring new skills in the exercise of power for which there are no adequate precedents and prototypes in our culture.

Finally, let me indicate very briefly a whole range of further emerging areas of development. Experiment with methods of confrontation and conflict-resolution that deal realistically with the inescapable tensions of human interaction in a community. The cultivation of sex positive theory, sex positive attitudes and practices. The generation of new rituals that deepen the meaning

found in and given to human existence within the co-counselling culture. The cultivation of individual expressive style to make manifest the liberated person. The use of self and peer assessment and self and peer accreditation procedures in training and launching new co-counselling teachers. Continual monitoring of other growth methods to see what can enrich co-counselling practice. The application of the co-counselling ethos and regular co-counselling practice within radical new courses within higher and continuing education institutions. The continued search of a minority to integrate co-counselling with a communal life-style. And so on.

Personal and political liberation through peer self-help, mutual aid, is a potent ideology and a potent practice. It generates its own destiny.

Co-Counselling, Personal Liberation & Social Change

Georgina Winkley

The Social Implications of Personal Growth.

Most people begin co-counselling because they want to change themselves in the context of their own personal lives. There are, however, two points at which the process itself changes gear, and people who have embraced both theory and practice eagerly at first may get stuck or drop out.

The first is when they have cleaned up the nuisance-behaviours which they were aware of when they began and which they could easily dispense with as "not really me". Until now the rewards of co-counselling have been obvious and immediate, and material brought to attention in session-time was easily left behind at the end. Now, one person may say, "I don't know what to work on: nothing comes to mind", and another, "Since that last session, I just haven't been able to get out of the feelings". Only those who accept the proposition that what they have hitherto thought of as essential, unchangeable aspects of their personalities may in fact be distress patterns within which they consent to think, feel and act all the time, and decide to push through the discomfort towards the potentialities beyond, will stick at it past this point.

Personal growth might now become an end in itself, were it not that people tend fairly soon to come up against a second barrier. They begin to realise