

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.

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## 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

that much of this chronic distress is not the accidental result of individual misadventure, but is common to whole groups of people, and is socially perpetuated as normal, inevitable or even desirable. The distress discharged in a session one evening tends to be re-installed at work the next day, and changing that is more than dealing with personal idiosyncracies. One's own individual growth now becomes synonymous with the liberation of the groups to which one belongs - even of those to which one does **not** belong. Co-counsellors are not required to become agents of social change, but those who have so chosen, or so regarded themselves before they began counselling, have altered the climate of the communities to which they belong.

### **Co-counselling and the Women's Movement.**

More than twice as many women as men come into co-counselling classes, and more of them tend to stay. Of those who began counselling in the early '70's, many were active in the Women's Movement and some in other pressure groups as well. They challenged some of the organizational practices of the communities, and won recognition that sexism was an issue both within co-counselling and in society at large. Their progress in changing attitudes and practice broadly corresponds to that of the movement as a whole; they publish widely, are very active in the day-to-day running of affairs, have nominal access to positions of power but actually tend not to occupy them, and influence rather than determining policy. However, some women confront sexist issues in the context of co-counselling who would not join any other kind of women's group, and the theory on sexism has the strength that it is related to what are understood to be basic human interests: other oppressed groups are not regarded as rivals, nor men as the enemy.

### **Co-counselling and the Working Class.**

Like other human growth methods, co-counselling is in practice mainly a middle-class activity. When people who felt uncomfortable about that began bringing working-class friends to workshops, a good many in-group norms were challenged and co-counsellors who had felt confident that the current state of theory was the answer to all the problems of humanity were forced to think again. A rash of working-class support groups broke out, in which, most commonly, people currently living a middle-class life-style or having experienced a middle-class education acknowledged their working-class roots and faced up to the inner conflict and pretence which had been the price of their upward mobility. The underlying common interest is expressed in the view that everyone is a worker, waged or unwaged, unless s/he is actually one of the owning five per cent. Hard core proletarian co-counsellors are still very few, but they do exist and they raise their voices loud; there is, moreover, enough social diversity within the communities for the view that removing social inequalities is only a matter of discharging distress to be regularly and firmly challenged.

## **Co-counselling and Racism: a Breakthrough.**

The outspokenness of working-class entrants to co-counselling began to throw light on the reasons why, despite consistent efforts to broaden its base, co-counselling remained not only predominantly middle-class but also predominantly white, anglo-saxon and protestant. Co-counsellors who considered themselves highly liberal were told by blacks and third-worlders that their unaware racism stuck out for miles. Efforts to raise consciousness on this and the other two major forms of oppression which had so far been identified gave rise to the practice of scanning all incidents where a perceived difference between people had been used to justify mistreatment. There emerged techniques for linking work on one's own hurts with efforts to change the ways in which each of us either directly perpetuates or colludes in the oppression of others - and the hurt underlying these unaware attitudes and behaviours proved to be deeper still. People appear to need to love even more than they need to be loved, and children to be particularly devastated by experiences in which they must helplessly witness or co-operate in the systematic ill-treatment of others.

## **A Hierarchy of Oppressions?**

Once the general relationship between victim and oppressor roles was grasped, it became clear that working on oppression is everybody's concern. We are all caught in the mesh of its interrelations and have our lives shaped by it. But where to start? Is one form of oppression more important than another? What is cause and what is effect? Why is a housewife oppressed, but a hen-pecked husband merely mistreated? Are the implications for co-counselling practice different in either case? Tentative positions on the theoretical issues have emerged as follows:

Oppression is understood to be the systematic mistreatment of persons as members of a group or class, originating outside the group or class but confirmed and maintained within it by the members' own distress patterns. These mechanisms of internalised oppression divide one oppressed group against another, so that black and Pakistani children will emerge from a white-dominated school and stone each other in the street.

Accumulated perceptions of common interest between groups previously pitted against one another suggest that the basis of all oppression is an economic system whereby wage-workers are dispossessed of both the means and the product of their labour. This fundamental mechanism of classism is analogously expressed in the situations of all oppressed groups. If the legalizing of abortion is regarded purely as a feminist issue, the interests of woman and child appear to conflict, and, as on the occasion of the TUC march, hard-won solidarity between men and women can easily be thrown away. What is more significant is that relatively safe abortion has always been available to rich women; this is only one of many instances in which legislation can uphold the "right" of one social group to control the access of another group to economic resources.

Two forms of oppression appear to play distinctive roles in its perpetuation. One is where members of a certain group - the Asians in Kenya, for instance, Jews in many countries, and arguably managers in many organizations - act as agents for the oppressor group and, at critical points in the interaction, become caught in the crossfire in such a way that the rising anger of the oppressed groups is deflected onto them. The other is adultism: the systematic mistreatment of children, together with the encouragement to switch whenever possible into the opposite role: "You must learn to stand up for yourself, son". If the only alternative he can see to being ordered about is the chance to tell others what to do, he will gladly take that option when it comes his way.

No form of oppression is more important or less serious than another; but each can be fully understood only in terms of its economic base, which is the key to its abiding persistence in social reality.

### **The Implications for Co-counselling Practice.**

As a corollary of these theoretical developments, the practice of co-counselling has become more complex than it was once understood to be. A person's life-story is no longer just her material; the counsellor now tries to distinguish in it the hidden history of her race, class, sex and culture. She works to reclaim more than her occluded intelligence, even in its widest definition: the knowledge that has been denied her through her life-experience so far is possibly even more important than the information she can dissolve out of the patterned memories. Discharge, direction, action, yes; and let the direction and action be qualified by wisdom and understanding.

### **Co-counselling and Social Change.**

Social change is something about which we all have a lot to learn, and in this application the theory of learning developed early on in co-counselling, partly because so many co-counsellors have been in some way involved with educational establishments, takes on a new importance. The essential relevance of co-counselling to institutional change is, however, that people can use it to build themselves a reliable support system, both within the communities and elsewhere in society. Co-counselling itself remains a programme for individual liberation; it is not thought to constitute a comprehensive strategy for changing institutions.

It does, however, offer the would-be social changer hints on how to go on where it leaves off. Problems and issues will need to be identified, in the short, medium and long-range, and allies sought right from the outset; together with these others, thinking will be pooled, assumptions questioned, previous experience reflected upon, strategies evolved for the future. The reported experience of other co-counsellor/change agents also yields some guidelines as to what can be expected to work and what not. The over-riding importance of one-to-one communication is confirmed again and again, as is the ineffectiveness of peddling co-counselling as a cure-all, and the wisdom of making a realistic match between one's actual resources and the target of change.

Perhaps the insight which bears most frequent re-discovery is that serious matters need not be approached solemnly: a sense of humour opens up alternatives to many an entrenched position. Neither is it necessary to counsel everyone around you to re-emergence before you can prevail upon them to begin changing things; the change activity is to be undertaken in its own right, just as co-counselling is a tool for living and not a way of life.

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## Co-Counselling and Primal Integration

John Rowan

Having accepted the general idea of co-counselling and seen the way it has developed, what can we say about the more recent changes?

One of the most interesting things to be seen is that various approximations to co-counselling have arisen spontaneously in primal work. In Janov's centre they have a "buddy system"; William Emerson has launched his own specific version; Glyn Seaborn Jones has "Reciport"; the Whole Person Co-operative have started to do it recently, and so on. There seems to be some specific link between primal and co-counselling, because the same thing has not happened with gestalt, psychodrama, bioenergetics or psychosynthesis, for example. What is the reason for this?

On the face of it, it seems rather surprising. One of the strongest rules in the original version of co-counselling was that the client must always be in charge. But, as I said in **Ordinary Ecstasy**, "There is no way, for example, in which the client can be in charge during a primal, or even a 'mini-primal', as Heron reassuringly but perhaps misleadingly calls it."

I think the answer to this is that the statement about the client being in charge always did have an element of double-talk about it. If you are aiming at a lot of genuine discharge of powerful emotion (as Re-Evaluation Counselling clearly is) there is no way that the client can be in charge the whole time. The whole distinction which Jackins makes between genuine and forced emotion