

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

implies that the **genuine** emotion requires a **letting-go** of control. But don't see how you can let go of control and maintain control at one and the same time. And "being in charge" must mean being in control. (*)

The rubric about "being in charge" really has more to do with discouraging the counsellor from taking control than with discouraging the client from losing control. And seen in this way, there is much less of a contradiction when we come to the experience of a primal. It is merely a fuller version of what is encouraged to happen already.

In fact, once we look at co-counselling in this way, it seems that the basic orientation looks more and more similar. Both Co-counselling and Primal work look back to traumatic events, and regard neurotic patterns as stemming from feelings which were blocked off and assumed to be too painful to experience fully at the time of those events. Both of them encourage scanning back over similar events forming a chain back into the past. And both of them require a good deal of trust in the other person (or in the group) before one can allow oneself to go into such difficult and potentially painful areas of one's experience.

It is this trust which the Co-counselling set-up makes it so easy to achieve. Because I know that you have been through the same experiences as me, because I know that we both talk the same language, because I know that we are both aiming at the same thing, because I know that you are willing to open yourself up in the same way as you are inviting me to open myself up, I trust you. And this even be true if I have never met you before, as those of us who have been to big co-counselling jamborees know very well.

What I am saying, therefore, is that because primal work requires unusually high degrees of trust, and because co-counselling methods typically provide just that, the two slot together in a particularly effective way.

There is also a common pathology which affects some co-counselling groups and some primal groups. They become **so very** trusting of each other that they seem no longer to inhabit the ordinary world of everyday life. They cultivate their own rituals to an extent which makes it hard for them to relate to people outside the circle. There was a group of primallers in South London who became known locally as "the screamers" because of the problems they caused to neighbours. And I believe that one or two communes have split up because some members took up co-counselling in a big way and the others didn't.

It occurred to me once that co-counselling is like garlic - its fine if everyone is doing it! But if some are doing it and some not, the ones who do tend to get up the noses of those who don't!

I have a sense that some co-counselling groups do altogether too much validation, and that some primally oriented groups spend altogether too much time

stirring up feelings. It becomes awfully easy for all the good stuff to be located inside the group, and all the bad stuff to be pushed out there into the outside world.

But I think these **are** aberrations and pathology which arise from having too much of a good thing. And the good thing basically **is** trust.

Social Implications

Focussing on this word "trust" reminds us that trust is central not only to deep one-to-one and group work, but also to all social arrangements which are non-repressive. Perhaps we can learn something from co-counselling about social relations with high synergy.

Social synergy means social-institutional conditions which fuse selfishness and unselfishness, by arranging it so that when I pursue "selfish" gratifications I automatically help others, and when I try to be altruistic, I automatically reward and gratify myself also. High-synergy cultures are secure, poised, welcoming and high in mutual trust; low-synergy cultures are insecure, anxious, surly and low in mutual trust. High-synergy cultures are low in aggression; low-synergy cultures have a win-lose attitude to most things.

Not that high-synergy cultures are all harmony and light - conflicting interests and desires arise in them as in all other spheres. But in a high-synergy culture conflicts are brought out and worked through, not made an excuse for denying someone's reality.

It is perhaps no accident, therefore, that Re-evaluation Counselling has reached out to other forms of social liberation, running conferences and issuing magazines addressed to women (sisters), lecturers, (Colleague), the handicapped (Complete Elegance), teachers (Class room), third world people (Asian-American Re-evaluation), blacks (Black Re-emergence), parents (The Caring Parent) and others.

No accident either that one of the later forms of co-counselling (The Barefoot Psychoanalyst school) has an explicitly Left political stance, taking its name from Mao's barefoot doctors and much of its theory from Marx and Reich (as well as from Horney and Winnicott). Their book of the same name is the most accessible introduction to the basic principles of co-counselling in existence, because it encourages people to start work with the book alone, not even waiting for a class to start or a local teacher to set up in business.

And the authors of **The Barefoot Psychoanalyst** have gone on to examine the ways in which high synergy expresses itself in the actual work that groups of people do together, pointing out that satisfying work has an orgasmic quality. They have also been into the question of how Reich's work-democracy cycle (high synergy) can turn into Bion's basic-neurotic-assumption cycle (low synergy) when trust is lost.

It does seem, then, that there is something about co-counselling which somehow gives rise to increased depth in counselling and therapy, and to increased interest in the social environment. In the past there have been two very separate things - those interested in politics have been seen as "hawks", "/wheelies", "power-nippers/ and so forth, while those interested in therapy have been seen as "doves/, "feelies", "narcissists/ and so on. In co-counselling these two sides somehow come together.

One of the things we do in co-counselling is to "hold a direction" - that is, to take a powerful statement which has moved us in our own therapy, and continually come back to it until we need it no more. And some of the most powerful directions to hold are the paradoxical, seemingly contradictory ones - these seem more complex, more fully human. For example, "I can be strong and vulnerable at the same time" is one which was powerful for me when I first came across it, and in my work as a therapist I have used it again and again at suitable moments, when my client came to that point, of just beginning to see the truth of it.

Another one is one which I have used since 1971, often signing my letters with it.

"All we know is that we have to struggle with love as well as opposition in our hearts. If we just have the love, the old ways continue their disgusting course, only touches with a certain glow, like phosphorescence; if we just have the struggle, we soon become wooden soldiers fit for nothing but being pushed around by some leader. It is about love **and** struggle."

Co-counselling seems to be able to bring these two things together, and I think it needs to be taken very seriously because of that.

Love and struggle,

References

Arthur Janov. **The primal scream**, Abacus 1973.

Arthur Janov and E. Michael Holden. **Primal man: The new consciousness**, Abacus 1977.

William Emerson can be contacted through Peg English, 64 Delaware Mansions, Delaware Road, London W9.

Glyn Seaborn Jones can be contacted through Ruth Harrison, 10 Steele's Mews South, London NW3.

The Whole Person Co-operative can be contacted through Julie Moore, 22H Powis Square, London W11.

John Rowan. **Ordinary ecstasy: Humanistic psychology in action**, Routledge and Kegan Paul 1976.

Re-evaluation Counselling has no one reference person for this country.

Lists of local area reference people are to be found in **Present Time**, obtainable from Julie Cowdrey (see address below) for £1.

Robert T. Grolembiewski & Mark McConkie. **The Centrality of trust in group Processes**, in Cary L. Cooper (ed) **Theories of group processes**. Wiley, 1975.

Re-evaluation Counselling magazines obtainable from Julie Cowdrey, 53 Dyne Road, London NW 6.

John Southgate & Rosemary Randall. **The Barefoot Psychoanalyst: An Illustrated Manual of self help therapy**, AKHPC, 12 Nassington Road, London NW3

John Southgate & Rosemary Randall. **Work democracy and character**, Energy and Character Journal, May 1978

(Editors' note: We think John misconstrues the notion of "the client being in charge". In our view, this has never meant control of distress emotion, but rather a balance of attention in which the client, fully letting the discharge of emotion go, has some attention in present time outside the distress that is being discharged.)

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