

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Vivian,

I deeply value the substantial contributions to our understanding of Gestalt and Co-counselling which Gaie Houston, Rose Evison, John Heron, Richard Horobin and John Rowan have given to us in recent special issues of **Self and Society**.

As a long-life member of self-help groups, who is also a trained counsellor, I feel that many of the ambivalences towards professionalism which are expressed to me might be reconciled if such groups had experience of the insights and activities which these workers share, particularly through Co-Counselling. How far is the Co-Counselling movement making itself available to the Befriending movement in all its manifestations? One group which I know well has always opposed using counsellors, voluntary or paid, professional or self-taught, within their own activities (although prepared to refer members to outside medical or other specialized agencies), because their members' council has each year considered that their own peer group befriending is adequate and should not be replaced. Yet could not Co-Counselling be conceptualized as an intensive/extensive form of befriending, and might not **some** befrienders be helped by being enabled to use its techniques, even if on a non-ideological basis?

Another response which John Heron's article catalysed concerns the discharge of past hurts and his view that Co-Counselling has the potential for "the human existence". May it not be in the area of the discharge of hurts connected with bereavement that such developments will be most needed? For we are increasingly suffering from bereavement experiences through rising redundancy and unemployment, home eviction, loss of status and retirement, abortion, separation and divorce, accident and failure, as well as death. Here I would tentatively suggest that bereavement is an experience which is generally most safely discharged by a slow work-through which includes past half-buried or smothered loss experiences: here, perhaps the bereavement befrienders could teach Co-Counsellors something! For Co-Counselling seems, classically, to have aimed at discharge of the more immediately resurrective kind, whilst the renewal and regeneration which the bereaved find in befriending groups tends to develop far more slowly, and, necessarily, occurs in the surrounding context of the family.

Love and Gratitude,

**Yvonne Craig**  
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