**Editorial – “CPR Special edition: Narratives of the healer’s journey.”**

*A myriad of pathways (what cannot be counted reprise)*

You are holding an anthology containing 7 stories. Not all stories are told with words. Our story begins at the University of Surrey’s doctorate training. We don’t recall the first time we met but we remember the beginning of our bond; a connection that seemed unlikely from an outsider’s perspective. May, in her final year of training, a “model trainee” full of enthusiasm and passion for counselling psychology and the world. Miltos, a first year trainee, affectionately described by his tutors as “a nightmare” due to his eagerness to challenge authority and propensity to turn up late for the first three months of lectures. We were both ‘foreigners’ to the UK, our home countries spanning almost the entirety of Europe’s latitude: Norway to Greece. We were not ‘best friends’; in fact we barely saw each other after May graduated, yet our connection was somehow sustained through the vicissitudes of training and the turbulent period that follows qualification.

It has been almost a decade since we qualified. We reunited in order to document stories, described by some as ‘data with a soul’, stirred to action by the shocking paucity of published accounts of therapists’ journeys. While we were working on this issue the edited volume *Celebrating the wounded healer psychotherapist* (Farber, 2017) was published in the United States. As the title suggests the central organising concept of these deeply personal stories is the ‘wounded healer’, a topic that Miltos has researched (Hadjiosif, 2021). Kirmayer (2003) argues that narratives of the healer’s journey may be crucial to the creation of both a personal attitude and a social environment receptive to the spirit of the work. Whilst we both identify as such, we wanted to problematize the ‘wounded healer’ as a dominant narrative principle in accounting for why and how therapists come into and navigate the profession. We wrote a call for papers asking for contributions that do not necessarily conform to this trope. We leave it up to the reader to decide whether the stories contained herein describe ‘wounded healers’ or something altogether different, whereby even the word ‘wounded’ is a misnomer.

You will not read our own stories of becoming therapists. After much discussion we decided it would be inappropriate to deny two papers the chance to be hosted in this special edition. We were also a little unsure as to whether our stories are interesting or developed enough to commit to print at this stage. Our primary goal was clear from the beginning: we want therapists to feel provoked and inspired to reflect on their own journeys, to begin or continue crafting their own stories; whether that is done in public, solitude, or in the intimate company of trusted ones is up to each to decide.

During the reviewing process we searched for papers that could throw new lights on the theories and tensions inhabiting counselling psychology, papers that could challenge our ideas about “who we are”. We followed a transparent system in making editorial decisions. We read contributions individually before deciding whether to accept for review. We then annotated the scripts and went over each paper jointly to ensure our feedback was clear, helpful, and consistent. Dispensing with the anonymous review process was a crucial decision which signalled our wish to engage with authors from an authentic intersubjective position. We both felt uncomfortable with the modicum of power that came with this guest role as neither of us relished the prospect of turning papers away. Nonetheless, we are confident that we have selected unique and compelling stories that tell us something important about who we are and the work we do. In selecting papers we also looked for stories that would nuance the diversity of the profession. Although our target audience is mainly counselling psychologists, we believe the issues at play are just as relevant to the wider counselling and psychotherapeutic communities. We are painfully aware that all our authors are white; something we tried, and failed, to mitigate against.

We feel honoured to have edited these papers, which stand in such stark contrast to the airbrushed versions of reality we are so often exposed to. What you put on a job application or online private therapy profile often erases the most significant aspects of one’s therapeutic sensibilities and skills. Students have little insight into the non-marketable experiences that comprise these and sometimes leave university with the impression that life is a resumé building activity. Again and again we were amazed at the courage our authors showed in sharing their vulnerabilities, convictions, achievements, setbacks and episodes of distress. There are parallels here with counselling psychology’s once radical proposition that categories of psychopathology are meaningless unless examined through the prism of lived experience. How many stories, we wonder, have been crushed in psychiatry’s mortar of taxonomy? The papers in this edition bring to life theoretical constructs, challenge our assumptions of ‘the other’, and inspire us to weave together disparate strands of our own lives.

We already know something about the power of storytelling, its therapeutic potential and how it can move us in ways that traditional academic papers rarely do. Frank’s (1995) image of the ‘wounded storyteller’ captures the processes we have been immersed in over the last three years. Narrative psychology’s birth is often linked to the publication of Theodore Sarbin’s (1986) seminal volume in which a proposition was put forward: the *narrative* as a root metaphor to understand human activity. 30 years later, we see that this metaphor is fighting for intellectual oxygen as the *machine* metaphor of cognitive psychology dominates both academia and clinical practice (Hadjiosif, 2019).

Counselling Psychology doctorate training programs are facing increasing pressure to produce trainees able to meet IAPT-friendly competencies. Currently, the Division is pondering its position in a larger conversation on whether applied psychologists in the UK should forge routes towards gaining prescription rights for psychiatric medication. Against this backdrop the training experience, from application to qualification, risks being reduced to the accrual of clinical hours, competencies, and treatment techniques. We make an impassioned plea for disciplinary reflection; for the Division of Counselling Psychology to consider what is being squashed out in our relentless pursuit of skills-based knowledge. The ‘tacit dimension’ of therapy (Strawbridge, 2016), the ‘professional artistry’ explicitly called for in the discipline’s official practice guidelines (BPS, 2006), and most pertinent to the conversation we want to kickstart: people’s rich, messy, non-linear life-histories. If there is one message that is crystal clear from the papers we reviewed, it is this: there is no one way to become a counselling psychologist or therapist. This tallies up with what Orlans and Van Scoyoc (2009) astutely observed a decade ago: there is a certain maverick quality that attracts people to this profession. The term maverick is debatable, nonetheless it’s likely more “*I spent 6 months living in a forest*” or “*in my spare time I volunteer for a soup kitchen, perform in drag, and collect witches’ artifacts*” than “*I have experience of running mindfulness groups in the NHS*”. Thus, it is with a degree of sadness that we observe UK training programs selecting candidates based on what they have achieved (their ‘successes’ so to speak) rather than what they have learned from their ‘failures’ and the wondrous spectrum of unarticulated experiences in between. It is those experiences we hope to cast a light on, as our belief is that they form as much a part of a therapist’s fabric as anything that is auditable, measurable, and straightforwardly learnable.

In REF terms (Research Excellence Framework; cf. REF2021, n.d.) none of these papers will be deemed to ‘create impact’ and they will be entirely dismissed by academic judging panels as scholarly work worthy of anybody’s time, let alone funding. This issue is partly linked to the tokenistic way in which qualitative research is being treated by many psychology departments (Gibson & Sullivan, 2018). Concomitantly, it points to the nature of scholarly activity more broadly, and the demands placed upon the academic counselling psychologist to produce easily consumable research at the expense of activity (i.e. writing, thinking, feeling, and teaching) that does not necessarily conform to scientific tropes. We argue, and these papers are superb testament, that scholarship in the psychotherapeutic disciplines must absolutely entail an element of narrativization. Put simply, this means allowing teachers and students alike to story their experiences.

In conclusion we would like to specify that, in our minds at least, we do not accord the papers in this edition the status of ‘truth’. They are not *the* story of our authors, but more like *a* story told in this particular time, for a particular audience, and within several narrative constraints. Narratives are on-going affairs and we echo Bruner’s thoughts on how they end: the ‘consoling plot’ does not rest on “the comfort of a happy ending but the comprehension of plight that, by being made interpretable, becomes bearable” (1991; p.16). The impact these stories will have on each of us and the meaning we extract from them will inevitably say more about our own story than that of the authors´. The most fascinating prospect in presenting these papers to you, therefore, is not simply the distribution of seven terrific stories, but the processes they go on to spark as they become public and illuminate a myriad of pathways of the healer’s journey.

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