Counselling and Psychotherapy Research 1(1) (2001) 3-11
ISSN: 1473 3145
Published by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 1 Regent Place, Rugby, CV21 2PJ, UK

Developing a research tradition consistent with the practices and values of counselling and psychotherapy: why *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* is necessary

John McLeod
School of Social and Health Sciences, University of Abertay Dundee, 158 Marketgait, Dundee, DD1 1NJ.
j.mcleod@tay.ac.uk

Despite the general acknowledgement that it is important for counselling and psychotherapy practice to be informed by research, it is clear that in recent years a widening gap has emerged between research and practice. This paper briefly reviews some of the factors responsible for the current crisis in therapy research and offers a number of reasons why a healthy relationship between research and practice is necessary. It is suggested that, at present, there exists within psychology and social science a level of acceptance of pluralistic and innovative approaches to research, which may facilitate the emergence of a new genre of practitioner-oriented inquiry in the field of counselling and psychotherapy. Some of the ways in which *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* intends to contribute to this movement are described, for example the promotion of new forms of writing, use of information technology, and the creation of knowledge communities. Readers are invited to participate in this endeavour.

Key words: methodology, practitioner research, research policy

Already more than 40 journals publish articles reporting research into counselling and psychotherapy. Why do we need another journal devoted to research in this field? The answer is that *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* will be taking a fresh approach to the use of research and inquiry in counselling and psychotherapy. It will be dedicated to finding ways of cultivating the relationship between research and practice. When counselling and psychotherapy practice is genuinely informed by research, the personal experience of therapists is supported and extended by reference to the distilled knowledge generated by systematic reflection and analysis of the practice of many hundreds of colleagues. In an ideal world, practitioners should be eager to read what is published in research journals, because what they find there should help to make them more effective in their work. Similarly, researchers should view dialogue with practitioners as opportunities to develop better research studies. At present, as we all know, very little of this happens around counselling and psychotherapy. Research and practice appear to inhabit quite different worlds.

The aim of this paper is to offer an explanation of how it is that research and practice have become disconnected, why it is important to join them up in a more satisfactory way, and how *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* can contribute to the task of bringing practice and research into alignment with each other.

The gap between research and practice

It can be argued that the really significant periods within the evolution of counselling and psychotherapy, when new approaches have emerged, have been characterised by a close relationship between research and practice. In particular, three significant periods in the history of counselling and psychotherapy can be identified. First, the development of psychoanalysis, from the 1890s through to the 1930s, was associated with the use of clinical case studies as a method of inquiry which

"Over the last 30 years, research and practice in counselling and psychotherapy appear to have drifted slowly but steadily in different directions..... It may not be an exaggeration to suggest that, at the present time, there exists a crisis in the relationship between research and practice in counselling and psychotherapy. There appear to be an increasing number of voices searching for some means of rapprochement between practice and research"

allowed psychoanalysts to document, share and critically debate their rapidly expanding body of theory and practice. Second, the establishment of client-centred therapy by Carl Rogers and his colleagues in Chicago in the 1950s depended on extensive collaboration between clinicians, researchers and theoreticians, who identified, defined, measured and tested the elements of client-centred theory. Third, the emergence of cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) in the 1960s and 1970s employed the method of the 'single subject' or 'n=1' case study to evaluate the effectiveness of specific cognitive and behavioural techniques in the routine practice of CBT therapists. Looking back, it is possible to see many limitations in the research methods employed during these periods. Nevertheless, these methods were effective at the time in enabling creative interplay between the complex, personal reality of the therapy practice, and the more reflective, questioning process of theory-building and research.

Some important lessons might be learned from these significant phases in the development of counselling and psychotherapy. First, it is important to develop methods of inquiry that are consistent with the type of therapy that is being researched. Second, it is necessary to integrate research and practice, rather than seeing them as separate activities. Third, research is a collective endeavour: it is helpful to have a coherent theoretical/ conceptual base, rather than pursuing idiosyncratic lines of inquiry. In addition, people interested in the same therapeutic approach need to work together in cohesive groups, supported by appropriate forms of organisation. Finally, where therapy research has had an impact, as it did during these key phases, it has adopted a 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down' approach. Research has been largely under the control of practitioners, and has employed methods and research designs that are within the resources of practitioners. Counselling and psychotherapy research is different from contemporary medical and pharmaceutical industry research, in which breakthroughs are made in laboratories and then tested in the field; in counselling and psychotherapy, innovations and new ideas emerge from practice.

Over the last 30 years, research and practice in counselling and psychotherapy appear to have drifted slowly but steadily in different directions. Surveys carried out on psychotherapists in the USA in the 1980s found that very few of them read research, or perceived it as useful (Cohen et al, 1986; Morrow-Bradley and Elliott, 1986). My own research on counsellors in Britain in the 1990s (McLeod et al, 2000) discovered similarly low rates of research consumption, but a somewhat more optimistic attitude toward the potential for research to be of some value for practice. The gap between research and practice which opened up in the 1980s was a curious and paradoxical phenomenon. This was a time when more research was being carried out than ever before, and a higher proportion of counsellors and psychotherapists were receiving some kind of research input in their training, which was increasingly at Masters or Doctoral level. Why, then, did research appear to become less and less interesting and relevant to practitioners?

The reasons can, perhaps, be extrapolated from the list of lessons that can be derived from the success of psychoanalysis, client-centred therapy, and CBT, summarised above. As psychotherapy research became more institutionally and socially successful, it attracted funding and university appointments, which resulted in the creation of a cadre of full-time, specialist researchers. These new experts became the people who did research, while ordinary practitioners became the people who had research done to them (the 'subjects' of the research). Moreover, these experts invented new methods, research designs and forms of statistical analysis that were far beyond the competence or resources of practitioners.

Another important trend during the latter decades of the 20th century was the erosion of 'schoolism' in counselling and psychotherapy, and its replacement by integrationism, eclecticism and finally postmodern improvisation and irony. The theoretical coherence which held together research and practice in psychoanalysis, client-centred therapy, and CBT gradually fragmented, and made it more difficult to establish the kinds of research-practice communities which figures like Rogers had inspired. The tendency for the research to continue to fire its big cannons in the direction of the major theoretical orientations, at a time when many practitioners were moving away from these fixed orientations, was another factor in the dislocation of research and practice.

In counselling and psychotherapy in Britain, another major factor has been associated with the gap between research and practice. Most psychotherapy research is conducted within the disciplinary and methodological territories marked out by mainstream psychology and psychiatry. While in North America it may be the case that the majority of therapists have been trained in psychology or medicine, this is far from being the case in Britain. The British tradition has been that of recruiting into counselling and psychotherapy people who have previous training and experience in a variety of fields: nursing, social work, teaching, science, ministry, the arts. There is a strong interdisciplinary thread running through therapy in Britain (see Thorne and Dryden, 1993). Among counsellors in Britain, it is likely that fewer than 20 per cent possess a degree in psychology. What this means is

17461405, 2001, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/14733140112331385188 by <Shibboleth>-member@glam.ac.uk, Wiley Online Library on [15/09/2025]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

that many of these people find 'psychological' research papers not only unreadable, but also unreasonable in their denial of wider social realities, and objectification of personal experience and feeling. Because so much published research in counselling and psychotherapy is produced by North American psychology departments, there are few examples of non-psychological research with which therapists interested in other forms of knowledge and evidence can identify.

It may not be an exaggeration to suggest that, at the present time, there exists a crisis in the relationship between research and practice in counselling and psychotherapy. There appear to be an increasing number of voices searching for some means of rapprochement between practice and research.

The publication of a new journal, *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, represents a major institutional initiative designed to re-focus the debate over the relationship between research and practice in counselling and psychotherapy. One of the central strands of this initiative lies in reaffirming some of the reasons why research is important.

What is research for? Why is research necessary?

It is all too obvious that a great deal of the research which is published is carried out in order to gain an academic or professional qualification. From this perspective, research is a 'hurdle' to be crossed in order to reach a desired destination. While it is of course necessary for counsellors and psychotherapists to follow broad-based educational programmes (which include research), the 'hurdle' (or 'ordeal') approach to doing research does little to encourage the production of research studies that are meaningful, or to create a workforce that will view research and inquiry as valuable dimensions of continuing professional development. The approach of many academic, university-based therapy researchers is similarly distanced. Even when the researcher may have a passionate interest in doing work that contributes to practice, the conventions of academic writing mean that the results of studies are written up with great attention to methodological detail, and little reference to practical relevance. For many academic researchers, the primary audiences are other academics and funding bodies, with the interests of practitioner readers being a secondary consideration.

For the majority of counsellors and psychotherapists, actually doing the work is of primary importance. Counselling and psychotherapy are activities that are concerned with concretely helping people at difficult points in their lives. Where does research fit in with this? Why is systematic research and enquiry in counselling and psychotherapy necessary? It is possible to identify several different reasons.

Reason 1. The reconstruction of practice

If counselling and psychotherapy are viewed from a historical perspective, it is apparent that there is a core set of therapeutic elements which have existed in different cultures and different times. From the religious 'cure of souls' which took place in pre-modern Europe, and the various forms of indigenous healing rituals which are still used in traditional cultures, through to the many varieties of contemporary psychotherapy, troubled people have found it useful to develop a relationship of trust with a socially sanctioned healer, in which they could tell their story, express emotion, develop a new way of making sense of their difficulties, change the ways in which they related to other people in their life, and generally reflect on their circumstances. This set of common or 'non-specific' therapeutic factors was discovered by Jerome Frank (1973) in his analysis of healing practices in different cultures, and lies at the heart of the theories of Freud, Rogers and other key figures in the evolution of counselling and psychotherapy. In essence, the training received by counsellors and psychotherapists can be understood as consisting of learning how to create this kind of healing, therapeutic space.

In an important sense, therefore, there is a core of therapeutic practice which research does not directly touch. However, the social context within which therapy is practised means that there is a constant requirement to learn how best to apply these therapeutic factors in particular circumstances, for example as new groups of people seek counselling. One of the most powerful aspects of contemporary society concerns the speed and extent of social change. For example, mainstream approaches to counselling and psychotherapy developed largely in the early and middle 20th century, at a time when it seemed reasonable to assume that clients or patients would share more or less the same cultural identity and beliefs as their therapist. Towards the end of the 20th century, multiculturalism, and the oppressive effects of promoting the values and assumptions of dominant White culture, became increasingly important aspects of the social and political landscape. For counsellors and psychotherapists, this shift raised a number of questions. How did therapy need to be adapted to operate effectively in cross-cultural situations? What were the implications of multiculturalism for training, supervision, and the organisation of

"... there is a core of therapeutic practice which research does not directly touch. However, the social context within which therapy is practised means that there is a constant requirement to learn about how best to apply these therapeutic factors in particular circumstances, for example as new groups of people seek counselling"

17461405, 2001, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/14733140112331385188 by <Shibboleth>-member@glam.ac.uk, Wiley Online Library on [15/09/2025]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

"Client empowerment is one of the central goals of counselling and psychotherapy. In any kind of counselling or psychotherapy, the aim is not merely to help the person to cope with a specific current issue or crisis, but to do so in a way that produces learning for the future, so that the person can become more of an active 'author' of his or her life-story, and live according to his or her values... Critical research is therefore necessary to continue to draw the attention of practitioners and counselling agencies to the fact that maintaining affirmatory, pluralistic and 'user-friendly' practice is a constant challenge, and should not be taken for granted"

services? The impact of cultural pluralism has had the effect of introducing an important topic into the professional discourse of counselling and psychotherapy. A variety of conversations around cultural issues in therapy have taken place, in settings such as training courses and professional organisations, and in the published literature in the form of clinical case studies and theoretical papers. Systematic, formal research has been carried out into a number of aspects of multicultural practice, and has contributed to the professional conversation. For those who are particularly interested in cultural issues in therapy, it seems obvious that not nearly enough research has been done.

Many other examples of social and cultural changes have stimulated a need for research into how counselling and psychotherapy can be reconfigured to respond most effectively to changing needs and issues. Some areas of practice in which this process of reconfiguration is currently taking place include:

- the closure of psychiatric hospitals and movement to community care, in conjunction with the demands of user groups, means that many more people with severe and enduring mental health problems are seeking counselling;
- the humanisation of care policies in respect of people with learning disabilities has resulted in counsellors needing to find ways of adapting their approach to meet the needs of these clients;
- the rapid advances in technology in the field of reproductive medicine mean that couples receiving medical treatment for infertility are faced with an ever-expanding range of moral and pragmatic decisions. There is substantial evidence that many patients experience infertility treatment as highly stressful, yet relatively few accept the offer of counselling;
- the fact that, in the last few years, millions of people worldwide have begun to use the internet as a means of communication. Despite the predictions of many therapists, a thriving e-therapy business has become established. Some users claim that e-therapy has unique advantages, when compared with weekly face-to-face therapy;
- significant change in the world of work, with the introduction of new technologies, a faster pace of work, a higher proportion of women in the workforce, innovative management structures, and lower security of employment. The 'contract' between employer and employee is changing. Although the provision of workplace counselling has expanded significantly over the last decade, do we know how best to deliver counselling in the work environment?

These are just a few of the settings and issues around which the work of reconfiguring or reconstructing counselling and psychotherapy is taking place. A few years ago, the reconfiguring of counselling and psychotherapy was dominated by the 'discoveries' of child sexual abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder. Before that, one of the challenges for therapists was to reconstruct practice so that effective help could be offered within a limited number of sessions. It is clear that a lot is now known about working therapeutically with survivors of sexual abuse, and brief therapy. It seems very likely, then, that years from now a lot will be known about email counselling, and about working with people undergoing fertility treatment. In all these examples, the potential role of research is clear. Research can be used to find out what it is that therapists and clients perceive to be helpful or unhelpful, and then can more rigorously evaluate these therapeutic elements in follow-up studies that may range from single case studies to complex and expensive controlled trials. This kind of research begins by documenting and describing what happens in practice: in counselling and psychotherapy, innovative ideas and techniques always arise in and from practice.

Reason 2. Maintaining an affirmatory, pluralistic conception of therapy

Client empowerment is one of the central goals of counselling and psychotherapy. In any kind of counselling or psychotherapy, the aim is not merely to help the person to cope with a specific current issue or crisis, but to do so in a way that produces learning for the future so that the person can become more of an active 'author' of his or her life-story, and live according to his or her values. In contrast to this worthy goal, it is clear that there are many occasions when therapists and therapy organisations in fact operate to control and influence clients in the direction of the therapist's own particular vision of what is right or 'normal'. Although this phenomenon has been widely commented on in relation to the experiences of clients from different cultures, and by many gay and lesbian users of therapy, it is by no means restricted to these areas of work. The extent to which most therapists exert structure and control over the process and content of therapy has been revealed by research into the discourse of therapy and the conversational and interactional strategies employed by therapists (see, for example, Davis, 1986; Silverman, 1997). Critical research is therefore necessary to continue to draw the attention of practitioners and counselling agencies to the fact that maintaining affirmatory, pluralistic and 'user-friendly' practice is a constant challenge, and should not be taken for granted.

17461405, 2001, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/14733140112331385188 by <Shibboleth>-member@glam.ac.uk, Wiley Online Library on [15/09/2025]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Reason 3. Being witness to, and documenting, the critical dilemmas in living that are reported by those who use counselling

Counselling and psychotherapy can be viewed as making possible the saying of the unsaid. Often, people seek counselling because, in one way or another, they have been silenced in relation to an important area of their experience (Mair, 1989). An important role for counselling research is to document these experiences and make them available to others. Examples of the counsellor as witness can be found in Feltham (1998) and Etherington (2000). The idea of witnessing is not usually associated with research and inquiry in psychology and social science, and is part of a broader conception of scholarship (Denzin, 1997; Gergen, 1997) in which inquiry is explicitly linked to social and moral action, and to the emerging tradition of experiential research (Ellis and Flaherty, 1992).

Reason 4. Reaffirming the legitimacy of counselling in the eyes of the stakeholders: the public, the State, various professional groups

The question of efficacy has dominated therapy research for the last 50 years: does it work? Many hundreds of outcome studies have been published. A range of stakeholders are interested in the answer to this question, including potential clients who are wondering whether therapy is worth the time and effort, funding bodies and purchasers deciding whether to make psychotherapy available to health service patients or employees, and members of allied professions unsure of whether counselling is a threat, a potential ally, or an irrelevance. It is essential to appreciate that behind the question of whether counselling and psychotherapy 'works' lies the bigger issue of legitimacy (Hasenfeld, 1992). The recent debates over 'evidence-based' or 'empirically-validated' therapies (Henry, 1998; Persons and Silbershatz, 1998; Rowland and Goss, 2000) reflect the concerns of the medical establishment over whether certain approaches to therapy are legitimate forms of treatment. It is not enough to show that large numbers of therapy users are satisfied that therapy has helped them (Seligman, 1995). Legitimacy is politically and socially defined, and in the case of counselling and psychotherapy this means that only evidence derived from controlled trials and standard psychiatric measures is acceptable. Consumers' views are not sufficient. There are therefore two major tasks for counselling and psychotherapy researchers in this domain. The first task is to answer the very reasonable question: how effective is therapy? The second task, which needs to be carried out in parallel with the first, is to examine the criteria by which efficacy is evaluated: Whose criteria are they? Are criteria appropriate to the evaluation of psychiatric treatment also appropriate to the evaluation of counselling and psychotherapy?

Reason 5. Making it possible for practitioners to continue to learn how to do the job better

Many readers of *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* are likely to be counsellors, psychotherapists, supervisors, and managers of therapy agencies, whose primary interest in research arises from a wish to provide a better service to clients. How can research contribute to improving the effectiveness of the work of individual practitioners and counselling agencies?

It is important to realise that very little counselling research, at the present time, is framed in such a way as to be able to offer prescriptive guidance to therapists of the kind: 'if the client reports X, then research evidence suggests that best practice is to use intervention Y'. In medicine, where research evidence can often influence the choice of specific drug or procedure a doctor may prescribe, there is an appreciation that, in a situation where a clinician is responding to the needs of an individual patient, research evidence must be integrated with other sources of information:

> "Evidence based medicine is the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients. The practice of evidence based medicine means integrating individual clinical expertise with the best available external evidence from systematic research...(...). Without clinical expertise, practice risks becoming tyrannised by evidence, for even excellent external evidence may be inapplicable to, or inappropriate for, an individual patient. Without current best evidence, practice risks becoming rapidly out of date, to the detriment of patients.(...). Evidence based medicine is not 'cookbook' medicine. Because it requires a bottom up approach that integrates the best external evidence, individual clinical expertise and patients' choice..." (Sackett et al, 1996).

Thus, even in areas of medical care which may involve the application of highly technical information and equipment, and the collection and laboratory testing of samples, research evidence does not simply determine the type of treatment that is delivered, but must be combined with clinical expertise and the preferences of the patient.

Within psychotherapy, Polkinghorne (1999) has argued that attempts to reduce therapy into a set of evidence-based procedures laid out in a manual

17461405, 2001, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/14733140112331385188 by <Shibboleth>-member@glam.ac.uk, Wiley Online Library on [15/09/2025]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

" Too much research in counselling and psychotherapy has been dominated by the methods and assumptions of the laboratory sciences, such as experimental psychology, pharmacology and biology... Research which objectifies the client (and even the therapist) by imposing the methods and measurement strategies of laboratory science, runs the risk of misunderstanding the very nature of the phenomenon which it seeks to explain"

should be viewed as constituting a different kind of activity altogether. He calls this kind of work 'psychotechnology', which can be contrasted with traditional psychotherapy, whose purpose is 'the clarification and deepening of clients' understanding of their selves'. Polkinghorne (1999) suggests that traditional psychotherapy is based upon practical knowledge derived from many sources: culture, reflection, experiential insights, and reading books and articles. For practitioners the most relevant parts of a research study are those where the researchers describe what they did with clients or patients. It is this descriptive material that can help the practitioner to develop a wider 'repertoire' of practical knowledge, of what is possible, and what might happen, in different clinical situations.

It is possible to see, therefore, that in counselling and psychotherapy the goal of doing research that will enhance the effectiveness of practice involves both the development of better ways of understanding how research evidence can be integrated with other sources of information, and also the construction of better ways of writing about research. Specifically, if research is intended to feed into practitioner 'repertoire-building', it must be richly descriptive, and carefully contextualised.

Reason 6. Facilitating the personal and professional development of therapists

This final reason for the necessity of systematic research and inquiry in counselling and psychotherapy is implicit in all the reasons already listed. There are many ways in which research can play an important role in practitioner development over the span of a career. Publishing a research paper is often a significant moment in terms of the formation of a professional identity, and distinctive professional 'voice' (Skovholt and Ronnestad, 1992). Research can be a self-renewing counterbalance to practice, justifying and supporting periods of reflection and creativity away from the demands of clients and waiting lists. Research can represent an effective means of entering into collaboration with members of other professions. Research provides an arena in which more senior colleagues can pass on the lessons of their experience, and younger colleagues can criticise them, without descending into the kind of personal hostility and organisational splitting that have characterised many groups within the psychotherapy world in the past.

Developing a research tradition that is consistent with the practices and values of counselling and psychotherapy

These six reasons for doing research constitute a rationale for a body of human science that would be clearly grounded in the desire to make a difference in practice. An individual research study can be no more than part of a bigger picture, or larger mosaic. Sometimes, it can be difficult to see where a specific piece of research fits into that picture. Restating the rationale for counselling research, in terms of these six reasons, is a reminder of the different facets of the contribution that research can make.

But what kind of research should we do? Weaving through this paper is a sense of discontent with the role that research in counselling and psychotherapy has played in the past. Too much research in counselling and psychotherapy has been dominated by the methods and assumptions of the laboratory sciences, such as experimental psychology, pharmacology and biology. Underlying this approach to research has been what Stiles and Shapiro (1989) have called a 'drug metaphor'. Psychotherapy has been researched as if it were a drug. Researchers have looked at the active ingredients of the drug, how it affects different patients, what the optimum dose might be, how it works in combination, and so on. But, like any metaphor, the drug analogy highlights some facets of the phenomenon it seeks to illuminate, and hides others. Specifically, the drug metaphor significantly downplays the relationship dimension of therapy, the agency of the client, and the personal qualities of the therapist. To sideline these aspects of therapy is a serious omission. It could be argued that what is distinctive about counselling and psychotherapy, as a form of helping in modern society, is that it is collaborative, personal, respectful, and takes the goals and desires of the client as its starting point. Research which objectifies the client (and even the therapist) by imposing the methods and measurement strategies of laboratory science, runs the risk of misunderstanding the very nature of the phenomenon which it seeks to explain.

It is my belief that it is essential to develop a research tradition that is consistent with the practices and values of counselling and psychotherapy. Some of these practices and values might include: the idea of human agency, collaborative and dialogical forms of meaning-making, the importance of feeling and emotion, the role of language in constructing realities, the capacity for reflexive self-monitoring, the validity of sacred experience. It is, naturally, impossible to summarise with any adequacy the values underpinning counselling and psychotherapy in one sentence. Nevertheless, there is perhaps enough here to indicate the extent of the challenge that faces those carrying out research in counselling and psychotherapy. Avoiding this challenge carries two very significant risks. First, there is a risk that an ever-increasing body of 'objective' research knowledge will accumulate, which will become harder and harder to relate to practice (because it will become more

17461405, 2001, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/14733140112331385188 by <Shibboleth>-member@glam.ac.uk, Wiley Online Library on [15/09/2025]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

technically sophisticated and harder for practitioners to make sense of), with the result that the research-practice 'gap' will increase. Second, there is a risk that, in important areas of practice, an evidence base created using the research methodologies of psychologists and psychiatrists (and often by researchers belonging to these disciplines) will lead to the marginalisation of counselling and psychotherapy, because the research that is carried out will be not be asking the right questions.

In seeking to develop a genre of human science that is consistent with the values and practices of counselling and psychotherapy (Rennie, 1994), we are fortunate to find ourselves at a stage where methodological diversity and pluralism are being encouraged and nurtured within psychology and social science. There are many possibilities open to therapy researchers, including approaches and techniques drawn from ethnography, linguistics, sociology and philosophy. Some examples of how these methods might be deployed can be found in McLeod (2001). We are also in a period where there are exciting new approaches to the dissemination of research knowledge, using information technology.

The counselling and psychotherapy research community in Britain has a unique opportunity to contribute to the shaping of innovative and practically relevant forms of research. The interdisciplinary mix of the membership of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) means that there are individual members with knowledge and experience of research approaches ranging from the 'hard' sciences through to the interpretative methods found in the arts, humanities and philosophy. The fact that the research base for counselling and psychotherapy in Britain (outside of a few psychiatry and clinical psychology departments) is meagre means that there is the potential to develop new networks and projects. The fact that BACP has not, until now, supported a research journal, means that a new journal can take advantage of interactive information technology rather than being locked into static, traditional print technologies.

How will *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* operate?

How will *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* make a contribution to the development of a distinctive research tradition in counselling and psychotherapy? How will it operate? There are three basic principles which inform the way the journal will function:

1. Encourage new types of writing

The journal is intended to be read by practitioners. It seems clear that practitioners do not read existing journals because the papers they find within them are too long, over-technical, abstract, impersonal, boring and essentially written for an audience of other researchers. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* takes the view that practitioners will be keen to read research which is accessible and relevant. Specifically, the journal policy will be to encourage authors to be reflexive and contextual. By being reflexive, authors are being asked to be as clear as they can about the origins of their research in the practical dilemmas and situations in which they have found themselves, to explain fully their own involvement in the research, as co-constructors of the knowledge that is produced, and to report on the difference that the research has made to their practice. By being contextual, authors are being asked to give sufficient descriptive detail about who was involved, where the study was carried out, and what the experience of participants was, to enable readers to enter the 'world' of the research study, and make informed judgements on the relevance of that world to their own practice. One of the implications of encouraging new forms of writing is that we expect to see papers that might not normally be published in other journals. We encourage the submission of systematic case studies, experiential research where the author is a 'witness', and small-scale practitioner studies, in addition to more conventional quantitative and qualitative studies. The journal seeks to publish many focused, crisply-written papers, rather than a small number of lengthy technical reports. The journal will operate a website and electronic *Archive* where authors may make available technical detail or longer narrative accounts relating to papers published in the main journal.

2. Develop critical discourse around research

A central aim of the journal is to support practitioners in becoming informed consumers of research. There will not be a separate book reviews section. Consideration of research papers published in other journals, and research published in books, will be carried out through brief articles positioned centrally in the main part of the journal. Authors writing review articles will be asked to explore the meaning of the studies they are reviewing for their own practice. On the website, there will be discussion areas in which all readers of the journal can express their views on the studies that are published. The emphasis will be on developing a critical and questioning approach to research, in which the value of research findings can be appreciated and honoured, but in conjunction with an understanding that all research knowledge is socially constructed and partial, and needs to be carefully translated and interpreted if it is to have a meaningful impact on practice.

3. Create a knowledge community

The third goal of the journal is to act as a catalyst for the further development of research-informed

" The journal is intended to be read by practitioners. It seems clear that practitioners do not read existing journals because the papers they find within them are too long, over-technical, abstract, impersonal, boring and essentially written for an audience of other researchers. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* takes the view that practitioners will be keen to read research which is accessible and relevant.... We encourage the submission of systematic case studies, experiential research where the author is a 'witness', and small-scale practitioner studies, in addition to more conventional quantitative and qualitative studies"

17461405, 2001, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/14733140112331385188 by <Shibboleth>-member@glam.ac.uk, Wiley Online Library on [15/09/2025]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

knowledge communities, both within the membership of BACP and globally. The journal is not presenting research papers as if they were 'truth modules' written on stone tablets; all research is part of a conversation. On the journal website, every effort will be made to encourage dialogue and debate around each of the papers that are published. The website will also make it possible for people to suggest research topics, or propose themes to be covered in journal articles, or to get in touch with other like-minded inquirers.

These three principles are influenced by notions of pluralism (Howard, 1983) and inclusiveness. One of the best things about counselling and psychotherapy is that it does its best to allow people to develop their own 'voice'. The intention is that *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* should be multi-voiced. There is certainly an important role to be played by traditional forms of research which use standardised questionnaires and comparison groups. But there is also a vital role for emerging forms of research that are qualitative, experiential, narrative and case-based.

Conclusions

This paper has attempted to bring together some of the strands of thinking that have come together in the publication of *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research.* This new journal is an ambitious undertaking. It will inevitably take time to evolve a style of writing about research that is consistent with the aims of the journal. It will be necessary for readers of the journal to decide what 'works' (for them) and what does not, and to submit papers that reflect their own position in relation to the 'rhetoric' of research writing. It will take time for the journal website to reach its full potential, in part because of the technical demands and costs involved. It is essential, therefore, for readers to be patient. Even more important is the need for members of the counselling and psychotherapy community to become actively involved in the journal, by submitting papers, writing review articles, contributing to the discussion threads which develop on the website, and being open with feedback and opinions. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* is aiming to de-mystify research and inquiry, to re-align research and practice, and basically to make it interesting and relevant. But this is also *necessary.* If we fail to establish our own system for evaluating, appraising and reconstructing our practice, then other systems will be imposed (to a large extent, have already been imposed) on us.

© John McLeod 2001

References

Cohen LH, Sargent MM and Sechrest LB (1986) Use of psychotherapy research by professional psychologists. American Psychologist, 41: 198-206.

Davis K (1986) The process of problem (re)formulation in psychotherapy. Sociology of Illness and Health, 8: 44-74.

Denzin N (1997) Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ellis C and Flaherty M (eds) (1992) Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Etherington K (2000) Narrative Approaches to Working with Adult Male Surviviors of Child Sexual Abuse: The Client's, the Counsellor's and the Researcher's Story. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Feltham C (ed.) (1998) Witness and Vision of the Therapists. London: Sage.

Frank J (1973) Persuasion and Healing: a Comparative Study of Psychotherapy. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.

Gergen K (1997) Who speaks and who replies in human science scholarship? History of the Human Sciences, 10: 151-173.

Hasenfeld Y (1992) Theoretical approaches to human service organizations. In Hasenfeld Y. (ed.), Human Services as Complex Organizations. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Henry WP (1998) Science, politics, and the politics of science: the use and misuse of empirically validated treatment research. Psychotherapy Research, 8: 126-140.

Howard GS (1983) Toward methodological pluralism. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 30: 19-21.

Mair M (1989) Between Psychology and Psychotherapy: a Poetics of Experience. London: Routledge.

McLeod J (2001) Qualitative Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy. London: Sage.

McLeod J, Fewell J, Kirkwood C and Mearns D (2000) Counsellors' engagement with research. A survey of Scottish counsellors. Paper delivered to COSCA Research Conference, 23 September 2000, University of Abertay Dundee.

Morrow-Bradley C and Elliott R (1986) Utilization of psychotherapy research by practising psychotherapists. American Psychologist, 41 (2): 188-197.

Persons JB and Silberschatz G (1998) Are results of randomized controlled trials useful to psychotherapists? Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 66: 126-135.

Polkinghorne DE (1999) Traditional research and psychotherapy practice. Journal of Clinical Psychology, 55: 1429-40.

Rennie DL (1994) Human science and counselling psychology; closing the gap between science and practice. Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 7: 235-250.

Rowland N and Goss S (eds) (2000) Evidence-based Counselling and Psychological Therapies. London: Routledge.

Sackett DL, Rosenberg WMC, Muir Gray JA, Haynes BB and Richardson WS (1996) Evidence-based medicine: what it is and what it isn't. British Medical Journal, 312: 71-2.

Seligman M (1995) The effectiveness of psychotherapy: the Consumer Reports study. American Psychologist, 50: 965-74.

17461405, 2001, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/14733140112331385188 by <Shibboleth>-member@glam.ac.uk, Wiley Online Library on [15/09/2025]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License

Silverman D (1997) Discourses of Counselling: HIV Counselling as Social Interaction. London: Sage.

Skovholt TM and Ronnestad MH (1992) The Evolving Professional Self: Stages and Themes in Therapist and Counselor Development. New York: Wiley.

Stiles WB and Shapiro DA (1989) Abuse of the drug metaphor in psychotherapy process-outcome research. Clinical Psychology Review, 9: 521-43.

Thorne B and Dryden W (eds) (1993) Counselling: Interdisciplinary Perspectives. Buckingham: Open University Press.

The *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* website

This journal is supported by a website. The aim is to make it possible for readers to take an active part in shaping the journal, by engaging in dialogue over research issues, asking questions, influencing researchers, and having an impact on journal policy. It is hoped that the website will act as a gateway to research for BACP members, and others, who have previously been reluctant to engage with this activity, and operate as a catalyst toward a more research-informed profession.

The website will include:

- information about the journal, for example instructions for authors and subscription rates;
- links to other sites on topics relevant to research in counselling and psychotherapy;
- abstracts of articles published in the journal;
- discussion forum, where readers can share reactions to articles published in the journal, make suggestions around future issues of the journal, or ask for help on research matters;
- an Archive for the electronic publication of items that cannot be included in the main journal, such as Masters dissertations (in whole or part) and longer versions (e.g. including technical information) of peer reviewed papers which will be published in brief form in the journal itself. The contents of the Archive will be recorded in the main journal, with a brief abstract for each item (ensuring that the author can claim a 'publication');
- work in progress forum. Readers can write in giving details about research being planned, asking for collaboration, access to informants, etc;
- news of conferences, research initiatives and sources of funding, etc.

The *Counselling and Psychotherapy* Research website will be found on www.counsellingresearch.ac.uk from 7 May 2001 (subject to final approval of domain name). If you have problems accessing the site then contact the journal office on: counsellingresearch@abertay.ac.uk)

17461405, 2001, 1, Downloaded from https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1080/14733140112331385188 by <Shibboleth>-member@glam.ac.uk, Wiley Online Library on [15/09/2025]. See the Terms and Conditions (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions) on Wiley Online Library for rules of use; OA articles are governed by the applicable Creative Commons License