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# INTRODUCTION

This book is an introductory account of psychodynamic counselling. The term 'psychodynamic' refers to a type of counselling or psychotherapy based on the ideas and techniques of psychoanalysis, as distinct from other models such as cognitive-behavioural or person-centred. The word 'counselling' describes an activity derived from the ordinary word 'counsel', in the sense of giving someone thoughtful and helpful advice. However the term counselling is also used to denote a profession in its own right, and here the emphasis has shifted away from the giving of advice or practical help to the idea of counselling being a form of psychological help given to people in emotional and mental distress. It is in this sense that the word 'counselling' is used in this book.

To become a professional counsellor a person has to seek membership of an accrediting body. In the English-speaking world, for instance in Canada and Australia, it is currently the counselling profession itself which sets minimum standards for the professions. However there are moves towards statutory regulation of counsellors, as is the case in the United States, where state bodies have legal powers to regulate and licence counsellors. In the United Kingdom accreditation as a counsellor with the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy is currently voluntary, but a process of statutory regulation of counselling is underway. In addition to those who call themselves counsellors, many people use counselling principles and skills in their work, such as nurses, social workers and teachers. So the term counselling has to embrace both the professional counsellor who sets out explicitly to offer counselling to a client, and also those in the helping professions whose contact with their clients includes a counselling component.

My aim in writing this introductory book has been twofold. First, to try to distil psychodynamic counselling, as a body of ideas and practices, into its basic constituent elements. And second, to then describe, illustrate and explore these elements at some length. The book is intended as a primer, to give the reader a sufficient grounding

in the basic ideas and assumptions of psychodynamic counselling as a foundation for further study.

In describing the most basic elements of psychodynamic counselling I have adopted a focused rather than a wide-angled perspective. That is, I have chosen to look at these elements in greater detail and in more depth than one might expect in an introductory book. I have done so in the belief that the ideas involved, and the assumptions which underpin the ideas, need more than a superficial rendering, and that the significance and implications of these ideas can best be grasped through extended discussion and illustration.

I have sketched out what I take to be the basic elements or principles of psychodynamic counselling as follows. A consideration of what makes a relationship or set of practices therapeutic leads to the identification of one key element, namely the client having an experience of containment (Chapter 1). In order to provide this, the psychodynamic counsellor will strive to establish and maintain a reliable and consistent counselling setting, which will serve as a frame for the counselling work (Chapter 2). The psychodynamic counsellor also needs a theoretical framework as a means of making sense of the client's experience and behaviour. This is provided by psychoanalytic theory, the most relevant aspects of which are given in a highly condensed form (Chapters 3 and 4). Two conceptual systems are identified as having particular power to organize the counsellor's perceptions, thoughts and feelings about the client and the work into a meaningful pattern; these are the Oedipus complex (Chapter 3) and the distinction between experience in the paranoid-schizoid and depressive modes (Chapter 4). The most distinctive and potent feature of psychodynamic work is then identified as working in the transference, and its various manifestations and implications for practice are described and illustrated (Chapters 5 and 6). A brief description of the different phases of the counselling work follows (Chapter 7), from the beginning of the work with the referral of the client to the ending and its aftermath. The diagnostic distinction between neurotic, psychotic and borderline levels of functioning is explained and illustrated and some of the implications for practice addressed (Chapter 8). Finally, attention is drawn to the importance of a psychodynamic understanding of the institutional framework in which counselling takes place (Chapter 9).

A further aim of this book is to convey how the psychodynamic counsellor thinks about his work, that is, uses his perceptions, feelings, thoughts, intuitions and reactions to the client, together with his theoretical knowledge, to guide him in the way he shapes

the work with each client. To this end I have made use of a number of extended case illustrations. All counsellors and therapists are faced with the problem of how to write about their work, as the bedrock to any therapeutic relationship is the client's trust that the counsellor will respect their confidentiality. My way of addressing this problem has been to make up the case illustrations I have used. What I mean by this is that all the illustrations of clinical and organizational work are based on real cases – taken from my own experience and that of my colleagues, supervisees and students – but consist of an amalgam of different clients and different counselling situations, put together in such a way as to highlight the particular idea or principle they are designed to exemplify. I have done this because the cases presented here do not have evidential value; they are purely illustrative of the descriptions and explanations given. Hence I have been much freer in changing and inventing factual and treatment details, while still preserving the authentic 'feel' of psychodynamic work with clients.

In this book I have drawn heavily on the writings of psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic psychotherapists. This reflects the fact that the roots of psychodynamic counselling are in psychoanalysis. Writing in 1927, Freud in fact wondered whether there might one day be a band of social workers who would be trained analytically in order to be able to 'combat the neuroses of civilization' (Freud, 1926, pp. 249–50). I would claim that it is psychodynamic counsellors who are the legitimate heir of this vision, taking on the task of applying the basic insights of psychoanalysis to the wide range of clients who seek counselling help.

Psychodynamic counselling continues to be inspired and influenced by the ideas and developments within psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy. However there has recently been a growth of psychodynamic counselling literature in its own right, for instance in the United Kingdom with the appearance of the journal *Psychodynamic Practice* (formerly called *Psychodynamic Counselling*). Psychodynamic counsellors are also guided in their practice by the professional standards and ethics set by their professional organization (see e.g. 'Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy', published by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP, 2002]).

As they belong to the same family of ideas and practices, the method of working and clinical thinking of the psychoanalyst, psychoanalytic psychotherapist and psychodynamic counsellor overlap at many points (Jacobs, 1994). Indeed sometimes in this book,

when the context demands it, I have used the term 'therapist' or 'analyst' rather than 'counsellor' to refer in general to the psychodynamic practitioner. What distinguishes psychodynamic counselling from both psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy is its greater emphasis on the application of psychoanalytic ideas to the particular contexts in which counselling clients are seen. Most psychodynamic counsellors work in public institutions and counselling agencies, and a training in psychodynamic counselling aims to equip counsellors to work in such public settings. Here counselling is time-limited, and usually at a frequency of once weekly sessions. Working in a public setting also calls for an understanding of the organizational framework and professional network within which the counselling takes place, and this, in my view, should also figure as part of a psychodynamic counselling training. Those who want to work privately, in an open-ended way and at a frequency of more than once weekly sessions generally choose to train as psychoanalytic psychotherapists or psychoanalysts.

Freud famously advised his patients not to read any psychoanalytic literature while they were in treatment with him, for fear it would serve to feed the patient's intellectual defences against the emotional impact of the analysis. I am tempted to give the same kind of advice to the reader, that is if it is to be used as a substitute for training or gaining experience as a psychodynamic counsellor then do not buy or read this book. But if this book can nudge an interested reader towards finding out more, enrich the training of a counselling student or deepen the work of a practising counsellor then I would be satisfied that it has achieved its purpose.

In order to avoid the awkward 'he or she' in these situations, I have opted, as a man, to refer to the counsellor as 'he' and the client as 'she' when the gender is unspecified and irrelevant.

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