



# Counselling Research

A Call to Arms, or Death by Disengagement

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## Being Positive in the Face of Positivism

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### What do we want:

There is a danger that in the search for 'legitimacy', we enter into a Faustian pact whereby we sell our soul in the search for status

### Who are we:

We need to transparently wrestle with the ontological, and epistemological roots of counselling as an activity first, and then counselling research after

### What do we do:

Is counselling a *treatment*, and is a counselling session a *dose*; and what about manualised treatments?

### Where do we want to belong:

Positivism culturally seems to overshadow all, and is the club into which many seek membership

## Being Positive in the Face of Positivism

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### Who do we speak to:

Is the language of commissioners and policy makers the same as the public? If we put our own debates around the differences between *counselling* and *psychotherapy* aside, the public actually prefer counselling

### What is our problem:

BUT, if *counselling* struggle to attract the money to undertake RCTs, and RCTs are the 'Gold Standard' that NICE look towards, it is hard to find a place in NICE Guidelines. If you don't find a place in NICE Guidelines, it is hard to attract the money to undertake RCTs, and if you don't undertake RCTs.....

### Where do we fit:

How do we therefore, find our place on the hierarchy of evidence to inform decision-making?

### How do we do it:

We need MUCH MORE involvement of clients of counselling to help evaluate what we do, how we do it, what works and what doesn't. Fundamentally, we cannot afford and should not *do to*, but rather *do with* so that the development of our profession is a collaborative journey with our clients: perhaps then we can negotiate the challenges and opportunities of positivism

## Methodology: Quagmires and Conundrums

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### Do we limit our horizons:

There are some great methods out there, yet we tend to gather around a select few

### Shooting ourselves in the foot:

By questioning positivism do we *have* to question, and perhaps turn away from, quantitative methods

### How we question in the right way:

Robust research needs to draw on the right method for the question(s) being asked, as opposed to an ontological and epistemological purism

### Shaping our own destiny:

In drawing on the right method, which might include a quantitative method, we can perhaps help shape the nature of positivism as it applies to counselling

## Big Dosh, Little Dosh: Lone Researchers and RCTs

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### Feeling a little overwhelmed:

The Gold Standard: the danger is that everything else becomes second-rate, even though it isn't

### What's the use:

Counselling research is often small-scale by comparison, and we can collude with a mis-interpretation that what we do will have little impact

### Lots of little, makes a 'big':

Collating good quality small-scale studies, through systematic reviews or meta-analyses (for example), can make a difference

### Can we create cultural change:

This additional helps challenge (and perhaps create) a culture of the nature of evidence

## Ethics: Shh, Don't Mention the Client...

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### The fear it is us and them:

Ethics committees have insufficient numbers of counsellors sitting on them

### They just don't quite understand:

As such, they often don't understand counselling research

### Others become the route planners:

AND, as such, what is possible in counselling research is defined (or diminished) by others

### Playing it safe:

Because of our personal investment in the research (time, money, energy) we go for the 'safer' option, e.g., looking at therapists, rather than non-therapists

### Shrinking things to fit:

The danger is we can undermine our own impact

## The Dearth of Dissemination...

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### More heat than light:

Too little counselling research is made available for wider scrutiny

### Our best kept secret:

Too much counselling research sits within academic departments/libraries, never seen by practitioner, researcher or wider audience

### Growing into our own skin:

We have a culture whereby dissemination is viewed as arrogant, or exposing, or inadequate

### And what about our participants, and our clients:

We have an ethical duty to our participants to disseminate, where possible, and to our profession to help promote choice for clients

## Counselling Research: A Call to Arms

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### Don't forget the context:

Think of the bigger picture, as well as the individual focus, when thinking about a research question

### The adventure of the less known:

Embrace the diversity of method, not simply the straightforward option

### Look 'em in the eye:

Be confident in engaging with ethics and articulate a position robustly

### Not a Trojan horse, but a proud walking through the gates:

We need counsellors on Ethics Committees: take up opportunities

### And the client, don't forget the client:

Let's ask the client

# Counselling Research: A Call to Arms

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## Advocacy and empowerment:

Encourage our peers to engage with research: as researchers, as critical consumers of research; and framing our professional reflections as research reflections

## So what?

Always answer the 'so what' question: what is the point of what you're doing

## Pass it on:

Disseminate Your Research

Disseminate Your Research

# Disseminate Your Research

Otherwise, what's the point...?