

The New Zealand Journal of Counselling

Editorial

Following on from the previous issue of this journal, and after Margaret Agee and I received such enthusiastic feedback about the variety of the contents, we were challenged to live up to our new reputation! We are just as pleased with the contents of this issue, and hope you will agree.

Structurally, this issue begins with tributes to three influential shapers of counselling as it is practised in New Zealand today. Charles Waldegrave of the Family Centre in Wellington opens this issue with a thoughtful tribute to Michael White, whose sudden death in April 2008 shocked many of us. Speaking personally, I am grateful to Michael for his book *Narratives of Therapists' Lives*, which was an important resource for students I taught in Auckland, and which gifted me with the concept of “re-membering”, a way of making present, in our work, those who are physically absent but whose influence we still carry. This tribute is followed by another, to Esther Hall and her daughter Ruth Penny. Esther was a member of the first generation of counsellors in New Zealand and was very active in what we today know as Relationship Services. Ruth followed in her mother’s footsteps in many ways, and like Michael White, died quite suddenly in 2008. The essay is based on transcriptions of an audiotaped interview between Esther and David Epston (one of Michael White’s closest colleagues), and subsequently amended by Ruth with her own recollections. Michael, Esther, and Ruth have, in their own ways, impacted our profession deeply, and we are grateful for their wisdom and their legacy.

In an extended response to a new book, *Southern Theory* by Raewyn Connell, Edgar Burns, a doctoral candidate at La Trobe University in Melbourne, throws down a *taki or wero*, a challenge, for us all. The majority of counsellors and psychotherapists in this country have trained in New Zealand institutions, predominantly using textbooks and theory bases that originate in the US or England. Burns challenges us to find a way not only to apply these theories locally, but to scrutinise them as well, in that they do not fully fit the cultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand. Taking seriously the challenges presented by Connell and Burns would place a new emphasis on the need for greater training in Māoritanga and other cross-cultural practices and

sensitivities in this country. Burns argues, “Even as northern ideas offer things we want and find useful, the development of a professional and national maturity that honours and makes greater use of our own southern experience is central to counselling theory and a vibrant counselling community in this country.” His article is so stimulating that Margaret and I have decided to invite reader responses and reactions to it. If you wish to publish a written response, please read the Guidelines for Contributors and contact us if you need further guidance.

Volume 27(2) of this journal included an article by Sarah Penwarden on gangsta identity in South Auckland schools. In a complementary manner, Alison Burke, counsellor at Edgecumbe College, here offers an article on the spirituality of rap and hip hop, and the value of school counsellors having an understanding of these two musical genres as an avenue for identifying with the problems and promises of teenagers. Alison’s essay is not so much a “how to” piece as a reflection on what informs her counselling practice as she works with teens—those experiences and theories which we all carry silently in our heads, sometimes as part of “the unthought known” (Bollas, 1987), and sometimes as ways in which our educational and personal experiences affect how we phrase things or react emotionally to our clients (see Culbertson, 2008). Of course, many adults carry negative impressions of hip hop and rap, but Alison challenges us to rethink those views, very much in keeping with the new book by Lawrence Rubin on popular culture’s use in counselling practice.

In July 2008, I returned to Auckland for a conference, and while I was there, gave two public presentations on the University of Auckland campus. Each of these presentations was followed by two invited responses. In the next issue of the journal, we will publish my first presentation and the two responses, exploring the meaning of the term “Christian counselling.” In this issue, you will find my second presentation, exploring some new thinking on the relationship among genitals, gender, and identity. My presentation is sort of a “considered rumination” (in Oklahoma, where I grew up, we would call that simply a fancier way of saying “chewing my cud”), giving me the opportunity to assess the impact of Judith Butler’s writing on the ways I think about our task as counsellors when dealing with sexual matters, whether our own, or those of our clients. Excellent responses were offered by Josie Goulding of the Psychotherapy faculty at AUT, and by Jeremy Younger, a psychotherapist in private practice. These issues are all part of what my colleague Jenny Harrison once described as the three primary spiritual questions: Who am I? Will my life have meaning? and Where am I going?

Closing out this issue, we offer the first part of a two-part article by Andrew Kirby, a recent AUT graduate, surveying current thinking on the ways we approach homosexual identity in the counselling room. In a thoughtful discussion and critique of gay-affirmative therapy, Andrew proposes a valuable, integrative approach to working with ego-dissonant gay clients. Part 2 of this essay will appear in a subsequent issue in 2009.

Enjoy!

Philip Culbertson

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References

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