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# Co-Counselling Communities

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## Independent Co-Counselling Communities.

John Heron (25 Dec 96)

Here are some final reflections on independent co-counselling communities. They have pioneered their way through some of the very challenging issues which face 'self-governing peer organisations, exploring ways of being effective social structures while avoiding all forms of authoritarian control', to quote the definition above. Here are a few of the problems (together with their RC counterpart problems), which have been and are being worked through with a variety of strategies:

1. Impotent and messy democracy in which many people hang back for fear of being, or being seen to be, too controlling and directive. (RC has had the opposite problem: oppressive autocracy in which a few people stay at the top being too controlling and directive.)
2. Open sexuality in which people confuse distress-driven sexuality with liberated sexuality. (RC has had the problem of sexual hypocrisy: a stringent rule which prohibits sex between people who meet in a co-counselling context, a rule which people break, particularly at the top of the hierarchy, and then systematically cover up the infringement and abuse, a cover up with which many collude.)
3. Eclecticism without adequate integration: exploring all kinds of different growth methods, without attending to their effective interaction with existing co-counselling techniques. (RC has had the problem of dismissing too many worthwhile growth methods as 'junk' and as a contamination of limited RC techniques.)
4. Theoretical stasis and underdevelopment: the difficulty of sustaining an adequate peer forum for the development and refining of basic theory. (RC has had the problem of an oppressive central control of basic theory and its development, e.g. the integration - after RC had spread to several countries - of early RC theory with Marxist doctrines underlying the Communist Manifesto of 1848.)
5. A general reticence in sustaining outreach, in going out to lead more people into the freedom of their own autonomous and co-operative communities. (RC has had the problem of going out and leading people into pseudo-freedom within an authoritarian community.)

In dealing with these and other issues, and in their sustained commitment to human unfoldment, the independent co-counselling communities within CCI have shown, for over 21 years, that growth-enriching human love can flow powerfully within non-authoritarian structures and be conjoined with a spirit of open inquiry. Those emerging from the RC experience can surely add a very great deal to this process. CCI communities have always, to my knowledge, welcomed RC co-counsellors to their workshops for trained co-counsellors, as well as, of course, to fundamentals courses. There is a lot of exciting and liberating and rigorous work we can all do together. There is much more to be said, but this contribution [...] is already very long.

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# Independent Co-Counselling Communities

John Talbut (1 Feb 1997)

I have just been looking at JH's notes about Independent Co-Counselling Communities and I would like to respond as follows:

I think John's notes convey an unduly pessimistic view of CCI. Of course co-counsellors are human beings and we are not all perfect. If there were not things about ourselves that we wanted to change then we would not be co-counselling. So problems do exist, but they do not outweigh the very positive state of CCI. In fact the existence of problems and the ways in which we approach them adds much to the vibrancy of CCI.

These are my impressions from over 12 years of very active involvement in CCI of the situation with regard to the points that John raised.

1. Impotent and messy democracy: My description of the situation is potent and creative panocracy (rule by everyone). Certainly the level of activity in the UK and, I think, other parts of the world does not indicate impotence. I have been impressed by the way in which gatherings of co-counsellors, sometimes of 20 or more people, make decisions. The process may look messy but it is efficient. It works because participants take responsibility for their part in the process, are heard if they want to be and don't then go about blaming other people or the leadership if they don't get what they want. Frequently in smaller groups decisions are made with peer facilitation, in other words there are no nominated facilitators and each participant takes responsibility for assisting the process. I have seen this work with groups of 80 or more co-counsellors.
2. Open sexuality: I have been involved in running numerous workshops on sexuality and in exploring sexuality with co-counsellors. On the evidence I have, and I have a fair amount of evidence, the idea that distress driven sexual activity is rampant within CCI is a myth. Of course there are exceptions, but my impression is that generally there is a high level of awareness and responsibility around sexual activity. John Heron's guidelines for exploring sexual attractions and RC theories around sexuality and intimacy are widely shared in CCI. In fact I would say that one of the things that CCI is very good at is helping people to learn to enjoy their sexuality in aware and responsible ways.
3. Eclecticism without adequate integration: The whole point about "A Definition of CCI" is that it clearly sets out the boundaries of what is acceptable in CCI co-counselling. Any technique from any growth method that can be used within the Definition is acceptable, and nothing else is. This gives co-counsellors when they are in the client role great flexibility to use techniques that work for them. In practice this means that co-counsellors use analytical, behavioural, cognitive, humanistic and transpersonal method in seamless, flexible and effective ways.
4. Theoretical stasis and underdevelopment: I think that stasis comes when you agree on what the theory is. Since CCI neither attempts nor has any mechanism to control theory it provides a wonderful forum for theoretical debate. That debate is far more useful than any resolution since it encourages people to think and develop their own understandings.
5. A general reticence in sustaining outreach: There certainly is a problem here, although I don't think reticence is the right word. Rather there is no pressure to do this, there is not a sense in CCI that people should be going out and helping other local networks to get going. If people in a new locality want to get involved in CCI there does not seem to be any

reticence in CCI to give help and support and no shortage of teachers willing to go to new places to teach co-counselling. What CCI relies on, though, is for people locally to put in the sustained effort needed to keep organising and recruiting for the basic training courses and organising ongoing activities and networking.

Also, I don't think John is right about RCers being welcome to CCI workshops. Maybe the way for me to respond to that is to add another FAQ: Can RC co-counsellors attend CCI activities. In general the answer to this is 'No'. In order to be entitled to attend activities for CCI co-counsellors someone would need to comply with John Heron's "A Definition of Co-Counselling". However, the nature of CCI is such that it is up to the organisers of activities, the people taking part in them or both to decide who can attend so some CCI activities are open to RC co-counsellors. There are also occasional activities, which are for co-counsellors of any variety.