# CO-COUNSELLING: AN EXPERIENTIAL INQUIRY (2)

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BACKGROUND

This paper is an account of the second co-counselling co-research project. The first project was completed at the end of 1980, and is reported in an earlier paper (Heron and Reason, 1981). At the end of that project, the people involved drew up a list of aspects of co-counselling worthy of further research attention, and included on that list was the application of co-counselling to everyday life:

> One test of our skill as counsellors is our ability to be emotionally competent in everyday life, to notice distress and be able to disentangle ourselves from it without taking time for a co-counselling session. Experiential inquiry might help us learn to do this better and clarify the range of viable strategies. (p 59)

When we (JH and PR) decided to initiate a second project, it seemed to us that this area was the next most important to look at: we had had a thorough experiential exploration of co-counselling practice, and had quite thoroughly mapped the territories through which a client might journey during a co-counselling session; we had developed new overall descriptions of the counselling process, and alternative ways of recording the process of a session; we had attempted to apply catastrophe theory to co-counselling, and had recognised again the importance of the transpersonal aspect of the counselling experience. And so it seemed to us that we should now move in a different direction, and explore the application of co-counselling theory and skills outside the actual counselling session in everyday life.

We decided that for this project we wanted to work with experienced counsellors who had a firm grasp of co-counselling theory and practice, and would thus be able to apply co-counselling ideas outside the actual session. And we also wanted people who were likely to be competent as experiential researchers, which means that in addition to being competent in the field we wanted to look at, they would have reasonable competence in being aware of their experience, be able to direct their attention to different aspects of their experience, and be able to describe their experience in words and in concepts. We decided that these kinds of people would most likely to be found among co-counselling teachers, and among those who had previous experience of experiential research. So we sent the following letter to all those involved in the first project; to current active members of the Co-counselling Teachers Co-operative; and to one or two people we particularly wanted to invite in addition.

> CO-COUNSELLING CO-RESEARCH PROJECT
>
> We (Peter Reason and John Heron) are co-counsellors and also founder members of the New Paradigm Research Group. In the autumn of 1980 we initiated a co-research project, which aimed to map out the various mental spaces which we journey through both as clients in co-counselling and also - with the sort of aware-

ness we derive from co-counselling - in everyday life. This project was successfully completed, and in the process we learned a lot, both about co-counselling and about co-operative experiential research. A report of this project is in preparation and will be available shortly.

We now wish to move on to explore further the practice of co-counselling, and so invite experienced co-counsellors to join us in a second project. This time the proposed area of inquiry is to explore the ways we may apply the principles of co-counselling in everyday life. This seems to be a critical area for inquiry, since while as clients in a co-counselling session we learn to manage our attention, one fundamental criterion for the effectiveness of the method must be our ability to develop a similar emotional competence in everyday life. Can we, for example, notice when events restimulate our distress patterns, and can we learn strategies for managing these, other than arranging a co-counselling session?

While we propose this as the major focus of the inquiry, we may also need to pay further attention to refining our maps of the co-counselling process, and to describing more fully and sensitively the spaces we tentatively described in the first project.

In this project, all those involved will be both co-researchers and co-subjects. The research model is that of co-operative inquiry in which everyone involved in the inquiry contributes both to the thinking that leads into, manages, and draws conclusions from the research, and also to the action/experience that is to be researched. We propose that our role as initiators and facilitators would be to share our experience of experiential research and propose methods for the research, and to offer a gentle facilitation of the group process.

The dates we have selected for this project are Friday May 29, Friday June 5, Thursday June 11, Friday June 19, and Friday June 26, all from 2.00 pm to 7.00 pm, all except the last, for which we expect to need a whole day from 10.00 am to 7.00 pm. We recognise that these dates will not be convenient for many people since they are weekdays, but our own weekends are in short supply. We expect that the project will require a degree of attention during the periods between these days for collecting experiences and checking strategies.

All the meetings will be held at 71 Shaftsbury Road, N19 (nearest tube: Archway or Finsbury Park).

Please let us know as soon as possible if you wish to join us on this project.

With best wishes,

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In response to our invitation, 17 people joined the project, including ourselves.

We also decided to experiment with a much more intensive format of research meetings, hence the proposal to meet every week for six weeks, ending with a longer meeting to pull all the ideas together.

## BRIEF CHRONOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF THE INQUIRY

### Day 1

We did an "arriving exercise", a round of introductions, then a mini-session. JH/PR alternated the facilitation of each bit of the day.

Decision-making Model We adopted a propose (by JH/PR)/consult model for Day 1, the model to be reviewed each week, but with peer facilitation in principle being affirmed. That is, throughout the research anyone may propose anything and consult with the others about it.

Experiential Research This research paradigm was explained: the model of cooperative inquiry in which all involved are both co-researchers and co-subjects. How this model can be reconciled with the roles of JH/PR as initiators of the research endeavour and as initiating facilitators on Day 1.

Research Objectives The group generated the following set of possible areas to be researched.

1. How I manage restimulation in me, in you, in us; and in relation to those either within or outside co-counselling.
2. How do I celebrate/affirm/enjoy me, you, us.
3. How do I love?
4. How do I interrupt patterns in me, in you, in us, in organisations?
5. How do I deal with attempting and failing to interrupt a pattern?
6. How do I manage the inner dialogue?
7. How do I manage my somatics?
8. How do I manage sexual impulses?
9. How do I handle conflict, contradiction?
10. How do I choose, make choices? How aware am I of when I choose and what I choose?
11. What are the consequences of the strategies I use for handling restimulation?
12. How do I negotiate the transition from perception into language?
13. How do I manage, relate to, the transpersonal?

We agreed to look at "how I handle restimulation".

Method The group generated the following set of proposals as to how to collect data on how restimulation is handled. Most of the methods concern how a person gets data about their own handling of restimulation: forms of self-monitoring and self-assessment.

1. Keep a diary and record triggering instances, the strategies used, and their consequences (in me, in you,

in us). Or do this on audio-tape. Or record it with graphics.

2. Where appropriate, record on audio-tape details of the restimulating incident and the strategy being used, while all this is in progress. Or on video.
3. Do a psychodrama in the group to portray a diary item from 1.
4. Use fairy stories, find a more subliminal way of recording one's data.
5. Do cooperative recording, or co-writing of diaries, using the phone.
6. We all record data on the use of the same stragegy.
7. Asking those who receive my strategy how they respond to it, and note down.
8. Confront each other in the group about internal collusion, that is, not recording the big ones.
9. Monitor and report on strategies used in the group here and now.
10. Set up a weekend to generate mutual restimulation and note down coping strategies used.

We agreed that each of us would keep a diary. The diarist writes up the diary when they wish, recording as much or as little as they wish, using words or graphics or both, reporting whatever incidents and strategies they choose to report on. We agreed, as a guideline only, the formula of noting down the restimulating incident, the strategy used, and the consequences of using that strategy.

NB What we are here calling strategies later on in the inquiry became differentiated into tactics and strategies. See below.

Resources in the Group We took time out for a round in which each person sketched in the resources they could give to the inquiry if appropriate. JH painting, general charismatics. DP video. ZS dance, painting. MH 20 years experience of working with the unconscious, hypnosis, available guru within. DS acting, games, songs. PR photography, research fund, theoretical ideas, writing, tape recorder. JoanH place, time, intuitive massage, fun. SB general artistic flair. VH graphical work, time, acting/mime, space. BH guided imagery work. BW hypnosis. SF analytical/critical faculty, massage, outdoor space. DP literacy, humour, space.

Use of Co-counselling during the Meetings We discussed the issue that minor (or major) restimulations would arise during group interaction, and that distress would be aroused by the very nature of the inquiry. Should we take time out to have co-counselling sessions during the meetings to deal with this?

We agreed - but not without uneasiness about it in a minority - that since the whole idea of the inquiry was to find out how we coped with restimulation when it was not possible to discharge the distress off in a co-counselling session, we would use

restimulation in the group to find out how we coped in the group without co-counselling. This led immediately to the following.

Here and Now Restimulation We had a round in which each person identified bits of restimulation that had occurred during this meeting and said how they had coped with it. This round generated some simple and quite basic phenomenology of handling restimulation. Most of the restimulations owned were what VH called "little fish" swimming just below the surface of consciousness. Among ways of coping were: Observe it and it stays little. Notice it and don't give energy to it. Let it go and ignore it. (For bigger fish) Breathe, relax and direct myself not to be moved by it. Breathe and settle inside and be where I am. Be curious about it and it goes down. Side-step it. Understand its origins. Breathe, meditate and be aware it's not to do with me. Withdraw into myself, hold myself together, tell myself it's not true it's just a feeling. Keep putting out, keep contributing. Own it, own block and under-lying fear. Own it to the group. Act against it, speak out. Tell people about me. And so on.

Writing Up the Research We looked at how the first co-counselling research project had been written up. We came up with something a bit different.

We agreed At the final session we would identify, from all our sources of data, the main sorts of ways of handling restimulation. We would make an outline report describing these categories in theoretical detail. We would circulate this report to each member of the group and invite them to add qualitative data to these categories from their diaries.

Day 2

Diary Round We had a brief round each saying whether or not they had kept a diary, what sort of entry they had made. Of 15 members present, 12 had kept a diary. Of these 12, 8 had recorded how they had handled restimulations, 3 had recorded this and also some celebratory experiences, 1 had recorded strategies for not getting into restimulation (rather than ways of coping with it once you are in it). The 3 who hadn't kept a diary said they had a week of greatly sharpened awareness of restimulations, patterns, and their management. The 16th member who arrived late had also done a diary on ways of coping with restimulation.

Small Group Work We divided into four small groups of four members each, and in these groups shared from our diaries details of the strategies we had used and their consequences. Each group listed the strategies shared, and then all the lists were shared and explained in the large group.

The items on these lists have been incorporated in the section on Findings. It was at this stage that one small group alerted us to the obvious distinction between tactics and strategies: a strategy being a policy to adopt a regular practice or several practices; and a tactic being the way of coping in a particular situation. So far in this report the word "strategy" has been

used to cover both "tactic" and "strategy" but mainly "tactic". This anomaly is retained in the report of Day 1 since it reflects the usage at the meeting on that day.

Validity PR gave an input on the various issues that bear on the validity of the findings of this kind of research: (1) taking the same idea several times round the cycle of reflection and action; (2) finding ways of avoiding consensus collusion; (3) owning and dealing with the restimulation precipitated by the research itself; (4) ensuring the collaboration in the group is authentic and not apparent only; (5) finding the proper balance between inquiry and growth/experience/action. These issues are discussed more fully in another section of this report.

Restimulation During this Research A discussion on this issue arose from Item 3 in the validity paragraph just above. While we seemed to have agreed on Day 1 that we would not co-counsel or work in group on distress coming up in the group, should this apply to distress that was clearly a reaction to the research per se? Should a person just notice and manage such distress or perhaps work on it in the group, such work itself being seen as part of the inquiry process and as a way of maintaining validity (by preventing distorted behaviour and thinking influence the inquiry and its findings)?

There was a dilemma here we couldn't really resolve. If we discharged off this distress, then we undermined the objective of the research which was to study how we deal with distress other than by discharging it. If we didn't discharge off the distress stirred up by the research, then maybe the validity of the inquiry would suffer.

Views were put forward in favour of discharging this sort of distress, in favour of working on it in other ways; in favour of discharging it in front of the group, and in favour of mini-session but no work in the group.

We agreed (finally) to let each person adopt the approach they felt appropriate. And to defer the issue until the following meeting.

Plan for Week before the Next Meeting We agreed to record in our diaries the sorts of cue or triggers that makes one aware that one is in restimulation and/or in pattern. Also to notice and record celebrations.

Day 3

Diary Round This was a short opening round to say whether we had kept a diary and sorts of things we had recorded in it. Of the 16 of us, 10 had kept a diary (some copiously, some minimally). Of these 10, 8 had noted down both celebrations and triggers to being aware of restimulations/patterns, 2 had dealt with the latter only. Of the 6 who hadn't written a diary, 1 had written celebratory poems, 1 had a clear celebratory week with nothing written down, 1 kept looking for noticing triggers and couldn't find anything, 1 noticed his process, 1 had incidents that caused

loss of emotional balance, 1 had celebrations and noticings of patterns.

Small Group Work We broke into four small groups of four each to share and list what sorts of triggers/cues make us aware that we are restimulated/in pattern. These lists were then shared and discussed in the large group. These lists have provided data for the section under Findings called "What Makes Me Notice I'm Restimulated, In Pattern". The small group work on this day and also on the previous meeting, Day 2, were central parts of the cooperative inquiry process, being midway between individual diary records and the final sorting out and ordering of data.

Devil's Advocate Intervention JH put forward, as an intentional devil's advocate intervention, the view that we had been taking for granted and hadn't noticed the underlying belief system that causes us to see a situation as restimulative,- and that we could choose, at a meta-level of choice, a belief system such that we never see situations as restimulative. And that, in daily practice, one can catch oneself, before seeing a situation as restimulative, and choose to see it is energising. Replacing one basic belief-system with another is not using contradiction as this is ordinarily used in co-counselling practice, since the use of contradiction already presupposes the co-counselling belief-system. Rather it is adopting a view of experience in which the practice of contradiction simply has no place.

Present State Round A round in which each person said where they were in relation to the research activity so far. One person reported a pile of distress, felt it had been rebuffed twice, and had research paranoia, feeling like data for PR and JH. Another person found the whole activity difficult and demanding. The other 14 reported in various ways their enjoyment of the challenge. And of these, 6 wanted more divergence and creative difference, even disorder; 2 wanted more order conceptually; and 6 wanted to pursue more specific areas of inquiry either individually or collectively.

Discussion on Belief Systems What, someone asked, is a positive belief system? Tentative answers which came forward: prayer as a belief system; a here and now it's-all-in-present-time belief system; economic determinism; choosing to believe in past distress that can be resolved.

Plan for Week before the Next Meeting A certain mood in the group threw up notions like: let's be more anarchic; let's explore changing our belief system; let's look into prayer and meditation. We agreed to create diversity and see what happens. During the coming week, each person would do their own thing, take their own line of inquiry - in the interests of divergence, so that we wouldn't press for premature conceptual closure on the data gathered so far.

Some of the individual plans for the week were: I'll look at what makes our view of human nature what it is; I'll look for a link between all my chronic patterns; I'll look at what it means to me to stay centred; I'll find out what my view of reality is by looking at how I flourish; I'll look at how I

elect my reality and intervene with a new belief system before I make my normal election; I'll do the same as a way of interrupting a chronic pattern, i.e. I'll stop believing in chronic patterns.

Day 4

Diary Round This was proposed by group members after JH proposed that JH/PR make no proposals for two hours. Both proposals received assent. Of 17 of us present, 9 had kept a diary record, 8 had kept no record. 7 people reported major upheavals during the week, of one or more sorts: phrases such as "massive restimulation", "massive resistance", "somatic ills", "totally chaotic week". Mostly it was massive restimulation. Was all this in part a reaction to our plans for the week at the end of Day 4? There was not a lot of focus on belief systems and election of reality: only 5 people addressed this during the week, whereas 8 people did more work on managing restimulation and patterns; and 4 had difficulty on focussing on anything very coherently.

Present State Round Each one said how they were feeling. Two people said they experienced the group as deficient in manifest loving care; two more said they would like to see the feeling aspect of the group developed, but without co-counselling.

Rounds on Restimulation The first round here was to give a yes or no answer to the question: do you know how you are dealing with restimulation in this group? Everybody did know. The second round asked: do you use here the methods you use elsewhere for dealing with restimulation? Many people said that here and elsewhere they used the method of noticing the restimulation and taking energy off it, turning their attention in another direction. ZS raised a major dilemma: whether to treat all restimulation as little fish and take the energy off, reversing old negative programmes, celebrating and letting catharsis occur incidentally; or whether to see if each or some little fishes are really big fishes by working on them in sessions. This dilemma is about what to take into a session.

Let the Fish Speak MH proposed a 30 minute group experience in which each person symbolically acts out the restimulative fish of the moment. We did this and then had a round reporting on the learning from it.

Plan for Week before the Next Meeting PR produced a sheet with categories for different degrees of restimulation and ways of coping, and asked everyone to look at it during the week. JH and MC objected. PR went off to have a session on his reactions to this. Meanwhile We agreed that each would continue their own line of inquiry during the coming week, and let next week's meeting take care of itself. DP said a high level of tolerance of chaos was a good thing and that we could pull the whole inquiry together, categorising and conceptualising, in one hour.

Day 5

Diary Round Of the 17 of us, 4 had looked at change of belief system and election of reality, 4 had focussed on celebration, 8 had inquired more into restimulation and patterns and their management, and 1 had been too swamped by restimulation and the week's pressures to do any inquiry. No record was kept of how many actually made diary entries.

Planning Round What to do today? Each person proposed something, and out of the ensuing discussion we agreed en the plan that follows.

Fishbowl This was to elicit themes, relevant to our inquiry, for small group discussion.

Market Place For anyone to pick out a theme for a small group and provide a focus for the gathering together of the small group.

Small Groups Four small groups emerged from the market place: (1) Belief systems and the election of reality. (2) Energetic prayer group. (3) Sacred and profane group. (4) Tie it all together group. The groups met for an hour or more.

Inspection of Data We laid out on the floor all the data sheets from this and previous meetings, and everyone spent time studying them.

Pulling it Together Groups We formed four small groups each having the same task: to do a summary on all the work of the inquiry. In fact, this proved to be too big a task, and the groups made an approach to it, but didn't do it. Two groups dealt mainly with some of the important process issues that had occurred in the whole group during our five meetings, especially those which hadn't hitherto been properly identified or dealt with. One group dealt some personal gains and benefits of the inquiry, and with some strengths, weaknesses and further possibilities of this sort of inquiry. One group blocked out the main categories within which to organise the data, and devised a way of writing the whole thing up so as to include everybody.

Extra Meeting We agreed that smaller group of 6 of us would meet in four weeks time to do a final organisation of all the accessible data of the inquiry (from 2 pm to 6 pm) and that immediately after (from 7 pm to l0 pm) the whole group would meet to check over the conclusions of the smaller group.

Close We closed the main five meetings of the inquiry with a circle. What came through strongly in that circle was a theme that had emerged on Day 3 and re-occurred for three or four people again on Days 4 and 5; prayer. We talked about this and experimented with an expressive "Hallelujah" round. It was clear that several members were interested in following through on this in some future activity.

Day 6

Pulling it Together Group  Four of us met to organise the data from the sheets compiled during the weekly meetings.  This was done.

Whole Group  14 of the original 17 (3 couldn't make this meeting) met to consider the work done by the putting it together group.  Refinements and additions were made.  All the results of Day 6 are included in the section on Findings.

FINDINGS

What Makes Me Notice I'm Restiroulated, In Pattern?

One week of inquiry, between weekly meetings, was devoted, by common consent, to notice and record the sorts of triggers that made us aware of restimulation.

The following classification resulted from sifting through our findings and records:

1. Somatics (involuntary): bodily goings-on not normally under voluntary control, such as sensations in the viscera, neural tinglings in the spinal area and elsewhere, fatigue, sickness, and so on.

2. Somatics (voluntary): these are bodily\goings-on in those parts that are under voluntary control, although of course the goings-on themselves are relatively unaware and unintentional: such as twitching of the limbs, twiddling of the thumbs, general restlessness, and so on.

3. Feelings (shut down): feeling down, depressed, inadequate, demotivated, sunk.

4. Feelings (churned up): feeling agitated, irritated, blaming, raging, etc.

5. Thoughts (conscious): negative internal dialogue, morbid introspection and self-denigration, mental paralysis/confusion/blocking, cutting out mentally in a conversation, realising I'm in a pattern by reading about such a pattern.

6. Thoughts (unconscious): distress-charged dreams, and daydreams.

7. Behaviour (verbal): extremes of verbal expression, extremes of tone and volume, oblique/evasive verbal behaviour, verbal disclaimer with laughing off.

8. Behaviour (verbal and/or nonverbal): distorted, compulsive behaviour of omission or commission (not me doing it/I don't want to do it).

9. Others' response to me.

10. Place: I identify bad feelings as restimulation when I identify the place as triggering them.

A Hierarchy in the Management of Restimulated Distress

Moving up the hierarchy, we start with

1. Tactics These are practical methods for dealing with restimulated distress (RD) in the actual situation. Below we give examples of a whole range of methods used by different members of the group, together with a provisional classification.

2. Strategies These are policies to adopt some regular practice or practices which put one in a better position to use tactics effectively in the situation. We give some examples below, also some classificatory dimensions.

3. Belief-System This is the whole conceptual framework that underlies a person's way of being and doing in the world. Co-counsellors, of course, have a belief system that includes such notions as: distress, restimulation, catharsis, human capacities, vulnerability, celebration, and so on.

3a. Functioning within a belief-system A person sees and relates to the world in terms of her or his belief-system. The system may be more or less explicit and well formulated, more or less tacit and inchoate.

3b. Election of reality A person is involved in a radical change of belief-system so that she or he is being and doing in a different sort of world. There is a further discussion of this below.

Tactics

As just defined, tactics are practical methods for dealing with RD in the actual situation. From our diaries and memories we culled a long list of tactics which different ones of us have used. We saw them, provisionally, as falling under one or other of four categories: Awareness Tactics, Action Tactics, Thinking Tactics, Emotion Tactics. These titles are intended to give only the flavour of the four sorts of tactics, rather than precisely to designate them. We hypothesised Awareness and Action Tactics as one primary polar pair, and Thinking and Emotion Tactics as another: they are pairs of opposites, so if you're good at one you would tend to find its opposite more inaccessible - but this we agreed was very conjectural. Also somewhat conjectural is the idea that Awareness and Thinking Tactics involve lower energy/arousal, while Action and Emotion Tactics involve higher energy/arousal. So we have:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Lower energy | Awareness Tactics | Thinking Tactics |
| Higher energy | Action Tactics | Emotion Tactics |

Awareness Tactics

These methods all involve something very akin to oriental sorts of consciousness training, especially satipatthana, inner alertness, in Buddhism. But rather than being derived consciously from such sources, they seem to have been arrived at spontaneously.

1. Simply noticing the RD.

2. Noticing the RD as it arises and not giving energy to it. This was widely used.

3. Noticing the RD and if caught up in it, letting go of it.

4. Noticing the RD and deferring it, putting it in the pending tray.

5. Noticing the RD and quietly accepting it.

6. Noticing the RD and loving it, giving it positive loving attention.

7. Noticing the RD and going right into it with full awareness and coming out the other side; taking attention right into it to disperse it. (This is a classic oriental technique, e.g. in Nyingma Buddhism.)

8. Going into one's centre, source; being at cause; disengaging and disidentifying from the empirical ego.

(Cf. St John of the Cross: becoming pure Act, beyond all name and form.)

9. Consulting the inner guru.

10. Autoscopy: seeing yourself in the situation from a vantage point outside your body.

11. Imagining an intuitive, spontaneous, nonverbal map of the situation.

Action Tactics

These methods all involve the person taking some kind of overt action in the situation. In the last two instances below the action is taken before the situation - so these two are preventive measures.

1. Switching attention off the distress through action: exercise, movement, dance, work, walk, paint, etc., etc. This is a choice not to attend to the RD and a very aware choice to put attention on something else. It is not avoidance or denial. This was widely used.

2. Contradicting in action the pull of the RD and underlying pattern in oneself. Acting against distressed negativity: reaching out against one's anger to validate the person restimulating it; acting assertively against feelings of fear, inadequacy, powerlessness; and so on.

3. Acting against the RD in others: interrupting awarely the distressed behaviour of the other; supportively confronting the other; giving space, time and attention to the restimulated other until they get some free attention back; and so on.

4. Where you and the other are both in RD, negotiating with the other for you both to talk your way out of it in a centred way.

5. Choosing to go out of the restimulating situation and switch attention as in 1.

6. Choosing not to dump, displace distress on the other, and acting accordingly.

7. If you see mutual restimulation likely to occur, talking it out awarely in advance of it occurring.

8. If you are entering, with someone else, a situation that is likely to throw you into RD and distressed behaviour, negotiating with the other to give you feedback, interrupt it and raise your consciousness about it when it occurs.

Thinking Tactics

These methods all involve some kind of cognitive restructuring of what is going on.

1. Using insight into what is going on in the situation, in order to step out of RD. Understanding the dynamic of how and why past distress is running into the situation - to give a vantage point of firm ground for getting free of the RD.

2. Seeing the restimulating situation in a positive light. Restructuring perception. Seeing the situation in a new, positive way that confers energy; rather than in an old, negative way that undermines energy.

3. Reasoning oneself out of RD. E.g. general arguments to oneself about the status of RD in the total economy of the universe; and so on.

4. Mentally holding a positive direction against the pull of the RD.

Emotion Tactics

These methods involve some kind of emotional process.

1. Setting up an emergency session to cathart the RD.

2. Catharting the RD on the spot. Of course this is often either impracticable or inconsiderate.

3. Catharting the RD as soon as possible after the critical incident. E.g. when driving away alone in the car.

4. Catharting lightly via a joke.

5. Redirecting the emotional energy of the RD into some constructive behaviour. E.g. redirecting the energy of restimulated anger into wood chopping.

6. Awarely and intentionally dramatising the RD, in a caricatured way, without harming others, as a way of disempowering it.

7. Expressing in the situation the legitimate here and now component of the distress. Owning and appropriately showing distress that belongs to the situation (if any), as a way of disengaging from archaic distress that doesn't.

## Strategies

As defined above, strategies are policies to adopt some regular practice or practices which (i) put one in a better position to use tactics effectively in the situation; and/or (ii) reduce the number of occasions on which one gets restimulated - i.e. increase the number of occasions on which the sorts of tactics listed above are not needed.

We did not do a great deal of work on strategies as such. This is mainly because we clearly chose from the outset to look at tactics in the restimulating situation. And to a lesser extent because the distinction between strategies and tactics did not emerge clearly before the group until the end of Day 2.

But strategies are clearly fundamental. They present a higher order approach to life management, rising above the purely tactical, ad hoc response to particular situations. The tactical approach is simply crisis-management: the restimulation is already upon you and you choose whatever tactic will best enable you to handle it. The strategic approach is more comprehensive: it anticipates and educates before the event. We agreed on the following different sorts of strategies.

### Deficit Strategies

These go directly for restimulated distress, aiming at reducing behavioural and mental deficit. They can be of two sorts:

(a) Crisis-oriented Those that prepare one to handle a crisis of restimulated distress. For example, adopting a policy of holding a positive direction in everyday life. This may mean holding it mentally against a chronic negative attitude of mind and/or holding it in action against a distressed restriction on behaviour.

(b) Preventive Those that seek to reduce the likelihood of restimulated distress arising. For example, setting up regular co-counselling sessions in order to discharge one's accumulated distress.

### Abundance Strategies

These go straight for the positive potential in people and seek to give it creative expression and celebratory scope. They deal indirectly with restimulated distress by going past it to the enhancement of that radiance that it otherwise obscures. Again we found two sorts of these.

(a) Coping Those that enhance effective coping, sound practical management of domestic or work life. For example, having a policy to use regular action planning and goal setting; joining projects to increase skills in coping; choosing to model one's behaviour on that of persons with exemplary coping behaviour.

(b) Flourishing Those that enhance positive flourishing, creative celebration, abundant and exuberant living. For example: having a policy of regular co-counselling for sessions which express a positive, celebratory way of being; having a policy of regular meditation, prayer or other transpersonal activity, to celebrate expansion of awareness, joy in one's source, the affirmation of one's identity beyond the distress of the everyday self; having a policy of regular periods of time alone for self-nurturance, recreation.

Strategies of all these above kinds may be either Specific or General: that is, they relate to specific items of deficit or abundance, particular behaviours or traits; or they relate in a global, holistic way to a whole range of behaviours or traits. So we get the following overall classification of strategies:

| | | Specific | General |
|---|---|---|---|
| Deficit | Crisis-oriented | | |
| | Preventive | | |
| Abundance | Coping | | |
| | Flourishing | | |

There is another classificatory scheme of some significance. It concerns by whom the strategy is devised, and who is affected by it. One of us (BH) pointed to the possible cultural, occidental bias in conceiving growth too much in individualistic terms: we assume strategies are to be made by an individual to affect that individual. Yet the power of this cooperative inquiry project has been precisely the collective generation of strategies - e.g. to keep diaries, regularly record tactics and their consequences, and so on. So we have this scheme:

| | Affecting me only | Affecting us |
|---|---|---|
| Made by me only | | |
| Made by us | | |

## Belief Systems

We now go on to another level altogether. As defined earlier, a belief system is the whole conceptual framework that underlies a person's way of perceiving and acting in the world. It may be more or less explicit in the awareness of that person. And it will usually be shared with others in some wider cultural or sub-cultural grouping.

On the third meeting, JH made a devil's advocate intervention to the effect that we hadn't yet noticed or taken stock of our choice of the belief system that causes us to see a situation as restimulative. And that maybe we could choose a belief system such that we conceive, perceive and act in a world where there are no restimulative situations. To choose a belief system in this way is to elect a different reality: it's not the same as using the co-counselling technique of contradiction, since it is to step outside the co-counselling belief system or frame of reference altogether.

This notion of changing a belief system, of electing to conceive, perceive and act in a new and different sort of world, makes possible a bifurcation of options that is of a totally different order to the bifurcation of strategies into Deficit Strategies and Abundance Strategies. For these two sorts of strategies are both within the belief system of co-counselling. They simply point to two complementary parts of that belief system: the congealed distress that humans carry around, and the positive capacities which that distress occludes.

The belief system bifurcation points to a choice between two different sorts of world in which to live; two different sorts of ways of conceiving, perceiving and acting in our world.

## The Co-counsellors' World

This is a world-view in which time flows from the past into the present and emerges into the future. It is a world of vulnerable persons with great potential, becoming hurt, distressed and patterned with rigid behaviour, getting restimulated, discharging and re-evaluating and affirming their way from past hurt to a present time, aware, intentional, celebratory stance in life.

## The Winged World

This is a world view in which time and energy flow from the future into the present leaving their inscription in the past. It is a world of creative persons with great actuality who emerge out of the abundant possibilities that the future pours into the present. Such a world is an energising cornucopia of endless possibilities for flourishing, celebrating, loving, delighting, risk-taking, problem-solving, adventuring, devising, planning, confronting.

In such a world the distortion of present behaviour by past distress is inconceivable, for the flow of time and energy give no space to such an effect.

If I decide to deal with restimulated distress by choosing a belief system of this second sort, then I am doing something entirely different in kind than when I deal with it by the use of strategies considered in the previous section. I am adopting a meta-strategy. I am functioning in a different mode of being and in a different state of consciousness altogether.

It was suggested during our meetings that such a new belief system is not a negation of the co-counselling belief system, but that the latter could be seen as a necessary condition of developing the former. After living and working on oneself within a co-counselling belief system for some time, the person starts to see the possibility of a new belief system, a winged one. A metamorphosis occurs. From within the co-counselling chrysalis, the winged being emerges.

Some members of the group, during the last week or so, tentatively tested the air outside the chrysalis, and put experiential feelers out into a world revealed by a new belief system.

## WHAT WE GOT OUT OF THE PROJECT

In the follow-up meeting we asked each other what we had got out of the project, apart from the sorts of finding given in this report.

1. Increased self-awareness

   Awareness of my own behaviour, both distress patterns and positive options.
   Clarified what I do.
   Awareness of tactics.
   New awareness of my stuff.

2. Increase in personal power

   Made it easier to be effective in handling restimulation, made me more optimistic about my power.
   Awareness of tactics cooled my restimulation and gave me space.
   A real spurt in growth.
   Got me out of a real pit with very little co-counselling.
   A real spurt in growth both during and after, both better and worse.
   Looked at my stuff with a lighter perspective.
   Easier to maintain a positive approach during the project.
   Gave me courage to take big risks and cope, whatever.

3. Value of support

   Got support and enjoyable energy from co-inquirers.
   Valuable to be going the same way with the group.
   Importance of group consciousness and sharing.

4. Awareness about belief

   Awareness of the importance of agreement about realities within co-counselling.
   Greater awareness of the belief system of people in co-counselling.
   Awareness that electing a new reality is necessarily cooperative.

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE VALIDITY OF THE PROJECT

As has been mentioned above, at the first meeting we proposed that this project should be judged against the five criteria of validity which were adopted for the first project. As we wrote before,

> Experiential research is potentially an approach to a fully authentic and valid process of human inquiry; it has many advantages over orthodox approaches, which we have referred to above. But valid inquiry is not automatically guaranteed: the process of human inquiry is inherently problematic, not only because of the apparent inscrutability of phenomena, but also because our eagerness to know and our desire for new discovery is balanced by a fear of knowing, that clings to the safety of what we already know. Excellent practice means for us being clear about the standards we want to attain in a piece of work, and reviewing our performance against these standards (that is to say, validity is itself an experiential research project whatever the content of the inquiry).

At the time we initiated the project, we set out for ourselves the following criteria of validity.

(1) There is increasing rigour through a cyclic process, with a series of corrective feedback loops leading to progressive clarification and elaboration. (As we have both argued elsewhere (in Reason and Rowan, 1981), valid inquiry involves a series of small steps, a progressive checking and rechecking, feeding back earlier tentative findings into new action and experience, and in this way knitting a more valid understanding.)

(2) We manage our own counter-transference. Following George Devereaux (1967) we argue that when we engage in research on persons the very process of inquiry stirs up our own personal distress patterns. We defend ourselves against discovery by projecting these patterns in a way which distorts both the method and the findings. This is what is meant by counter-transference in research. If the very process of inquiry stirs up distress, in a valid project we need to take it into account. We will come back to this later.

(3) We invent ways of counteracting consensus collusion - by this we mean covertly agreeing to ignore those aspects of the experience and action being researched which are not consonant with the theory being explored. One way to do this is to appoint one co-researcher to act as devil's advocate to represent sceptical viewpoints and draw attention to evidence which may challenge the

taken for granted assumptions of the group, or falsify some part or all of the initial hypothesis.

(4) There is some check on the degree of authentic collaboration among all co-researchers throughout the inquiry process: as initiators we expect to be significantly influential but not overpoweringly dominant.

(5) There is a balance between inquiry/research and commitment/growth/action. The rigour of being creatively poised between the two is adequately sustained throughout the project.

We can make the following assessment of the current project against these criteria:

1. Rigour through a cyclic process In this project we made no systematic efforts as a group to check early findings through later phases of experience and action. This was because as a group we made a different plan for each of the first three of the four cycles of the inquiry. For cycle one, we agreed to look at how we handle restimulation other than by co-counselling. For cycle two, we agreed to identify the triggers that make us notice that we are restimulated, and to record celebrations. For cycle three, after JH's devil's advocate intervention on belief systems, we opted for divergence with each person pursuing their line of inquiry. And the same again for cycle four.

So cycle two, instead of developing cycle one, started a related but different line of inquiry. Nevertheless on an individual basis the theme of cycle one was taken up again in cycles three and four, for in both of these over half the group continued to inquire into handling restimulation/patterns. Also in cycles three and four, the 4 or 5 persons who inquired into change of belief system, were also adopting a very radical or meta-approach to handling restimulation - by adopting a belief system that excludes the idea.

Cycle one generated a lot of very good data. From the point of view of cyclic rigour, we erred in not developing this and carrying it through into cycle two. And JH's devil's advocate intervention helped generate the shift to individual, idiosyncratic lines of inquiry in cycles three and four. Nevertheless it is important to note for three out of the four cycles, the original line of inquiry was pursued by most people during the action phase. It's just that the reflection phase during the meetings was not worked through systematically enough by the group as a whole.

2. Management of counter-transference We were alert to this issue but never really resolved the dilemma which is described in the account of Day 2: if we discharged off in our meetings the distress generated by the inquiry, then we undermined the

objective of the research which was to study how we managed restimulation other than by discharge; but if we didn't discharge off that sort of distress, then maybe the validity of the inquiry would suffer if alternative coping strategies were ineffective. We decided, on Day 2, to let each person deal with this dilemma as they felt appropriate - take time during the meeting for discharge, or deal with research-triggered distress by other tactics. Only one person (PR) adopted the former tactic. Was there too strong a tacit norm not to do this? Would it have been better if more people had done it? The very focus of the inquiry was in a way at odds with this criterion of validity, and so assessment of this one is peculiarly difficult.

It is, however, interesting that for whatever reason in both the first and this the second co-counselling research projects the management of research-triggered distress was problematic. In the first one, we had devised no built-in way of dealing with it, and it caught us too late-on somewhat unawares, although we managed it fairly well on an ad hoc basis when it did arise toward the end of the inquiry. In the second one, we hovered between the horns of an unresolved dilemma.

We may speculate that the need to understand and be understood, which is put forward as a basic need in co-counselling theory, when frustrated in early life generates - paradoxically - a fear of understanding which somehow we have not fully taken charge of in these two projects. Future projects will, from our experience, need to be much more alert about this one.

3. Counteracting consensus collusion We did not from the outset formally appoint one of ourselves to act as regular devil's advocate to challenge any possible collusion in thought and action. But on Day 3 JH made a deliberate and stated devil's advocate intervention, but of a rather extreme kind. He challenged the basic assumptions of the co-counselling belief system - distress, restimulation, patterns, discharge, re-emergence and so on - and suggested it is possible to choose another belief system so different that in effect by choosing it we elect a different kind of reality. To choose a belief system in which restimulation and related notions have no place is not just another tactic for handling restimulation for it is to elect a reality in which all such tactics are irrelevant: it's a meta-tactic. Were we, then, colluding in adopting together a belief system without noticing its status as a belief system and the consequences that follow from such status, and without therefore realising that there might be alternative perhaps "better" belief systems that would make our whole line of inquiry redundant?

This bit of devil's advocacy was taken up as a recurring theme for the remainder of the inquiry and was strongly influential in both positive and negative ways. Positively, it improved validity by raising in question the validity of the whole co-counselling belief system as such; it paradoxically offered a meta-strategy and a meta-tactic for handling restimulation (which was the main line of inquiry) - and 4 or 5 people pursued this over the last two cycles of inquiry, and it made the inquiry and its findings richer and deeper.

Negatively, it had some significant effect in diverting attention away from more rigour in pursuing issues of validity within the co-counselling belief system - e.g. in achieving more rigour in the cyclic process, in managing research-triggered distress, in developing more limited but needed devil's advocate challenges to findings emerging from within the co-counselling belief system.

4. Degree of authentic collaboration JH and PR were initiating researchers and initial facilitators. But of the 17 of us, 6 had been involved in the first co-counselling research project, so 4 other than JH and PR knew the form. After Day 1, the structure of the meetings and the plans for inquiry between meetings arose out of a variety of individual initiatives. The ongoing management of the inquiry was genuinely collaborative. But perhaps JH and PR sought to abandon their initiating role too unawarely, so that some tensions between them left something of an unresolved wake that muddied the collaborative process a bit. This is commented on again in the section Procedural Criticisms.

5. Balance between inquiry/reflection and experience/growth While in the first project more time was spent on inquiry/ reflection than on experience/growth, in this project it was the other way round. But the ratio seemed to be a healthy one. The actual research meetings once a week for 5 hours were spent in the reflection phase, sharing findings, ideas and information, and making sense of these. The week between meetings was spent in the action/experience/growth phase. So half a day a week was spent processing data from 6 days a week. This was fine, but still we didn't resolve the issue about whether it would or would not have been a good thing to have put some co-counselling into the weekly meetings. Would this have led to a better balance, or not? This takes us back to item 2 above.

There are some other issues concerning validity that emerge from the first project that it is useful to consider in relation to the second one. In the first project we discovered that (i) divergence aids convergence - to encourage the development and expression of individual differences and idiosyncratic styles and contributions provides a variety and richness that increases the validity of the convergence on the final data and findings; (ii) chaos facilitates the later emergence of order - being tolerant early on of disorder, confusion, ambiguity and uncertainty is a necessary condition of valid order emerging.

In this second project we went noticeably divergent on Day 3 and in cycles 3 and 4, arguably with both positive and negative effects on validity. There were dilemmas, uncertainties and confusion during the later weekly meetings especially, but the most noticeable bit of chaos was during the week of cycle 3, in which so many people reported massive restimulation, resistance, somatic upheavals, distractions and so on. It is not clear what this contributed, either positively or negatively, to the development of the project.

PROCEDURAL CRITICISMS

Between the end of the project and the follow-up meeting, JH and PR met and had the following conjectures about the limitations of the project.

1. Our general agreement in the group not to have short or longer co-counselling sessions during our meetings led to an absence of bonding between us all. At any rate there wasn't sufficient bonding to enable us to pull all the strands together and organise our findings on the last day meeting (so we had to organise a follow-up meeting to do this).

2. The topic - of looking at tactics and strategies for handling restimulation - probably generated high anxiety and triggered old distress, at some level of the system. Only one person discharged - and discharged massively - during the meetings as a result of restimulation arising during one meeting. This was PR. Was he a possible discharge surrogate for the others? And as one of the initiating researchers and facilitators, could he alone give himself permission to abandon the agreed norm?

3. JH and PR were too naive in very rapidly abandoning the initiating facilitator role, in the sense of not having pre-meeting discussions about possible lines of intervention and development, and in the sense of not giving each other feedback about interventions after the meetings. JH saw PR as having a tendency to go for premature conceptual closure. PR saw JH as having a tendency toward unaware charismatic manipulation. JH and PR agreed that for any third project they would not seek prematurely to negate - in their own minds - their influence, and would share and monitor each other's projected and actual interventions, before and after meetings.

4. There was a positive need to focus on one issue in the research; e.g. recycle more thoroughly one line of inquiry.

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