Dave Mearns
Peter F. Schmid

BEING-WITH
AND BEING-COUNTER

A person-centered view on in-depth interaction in the therapeutic relationship
Working at Relational Depth in Counselling and Psychotherapy

Mearns, D. & Cooper, M. 2005
London, Sage.
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AND BEING-COUNTER

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Souveränität und Engagement

Autonomie und Solidarität

Die Kunst der Begegnung

Im Anfang ist Gemeinschaft
(In the Beginning there is Community). Stuttgart, 1998.

Anspruch und Antwort
(Demand and Response). Wien, 2002.

Schmid, P. F.
relationship .....
BEING-WITH AND BEING-COUNTER
A person-centered view on in-depth interaction in the therapeutic relationship

I. From presence to dialogue:
Therapy as co-creative process of personalization

II. Relational depth:
The challenge of fully meeting the client
I. From presence to dialogue: Therapy as co-creative process of personalization

- PCT – a co-created relationship therapy
- More than the working alliance
- Company and confrontation
II. The challenge of meeting the client at relational depth

- Challenges for the therapist
- Criteria for working at relational depth
- The developmental agenda for the therapist
I. From presence to dialogue: Therapy as co-creative process of personalization

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PCT – a co-created relationship therapy

- **PERSON** autonomous & relational
- **ENCOUNTER** the Other
- **THOU-I-RELATIONSHIP** intersubjective, co-creative

fundamentally dialogical
Bipolar model of psychotherapy

D. Mearns: ‘working at relational depth’;

P. F. Schmid: ‘therapy as the art of not-knowing and the art of encounter’
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I. From presence to dialogue: Therapy as co-creative process of personalization

- PCT – a co-created relationship therapy
- More than the working alliance
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More than the ‘working alliance’

- The ‘presentational level’ of self
- The level of existential self-experiencing
More than the ‘working alliance’

‘SOBER DOMINIC’
and
‘DOMINIC THE DRUNK’
More than the ‘working alliance’

‘BOBBY’
Relationship challenges for the therapist working with Bobby

- Not to be ‘put off’ by his well developed, self-protective, anti-relationship mechanisms
- Not to be frightened by Bobby
- Relating at depth with both parts (fear and sadness) of his existential dialogue
I. From presence to dialogue: Therapy as co-creative process of personalization

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Company and confrontation

- Being with the client.
- Being counter the client.
Company and confrontation

- The therapist is not only an alter *ego*.
- But truly another *person*.
- The therapist is the Other for the client.
Company and confrontation

What are the criteria for a *person-centered* confrontation?

What does ‘counter’ in the therapeutic en-counter mean?
Company and confrontation

self awareness

experiencing

self resonance

empathic resonance

personal resonance

concordant

complementary
self resonance

Cl: Shall I love or hate him? I don’t know, I am confused ...

Th (thinking of his own partner):
Good question! You never know.
Company and confrontation

self awareness

experiencing

self resonance

empathic resonance

personal resonance

bracket off
or 'build bridges'
Company and confrontation

self awareness

experiencing

self resonance

empathic resonance

personal resonance

concordant

bracket off or ‘build bridges’
symbolize
concordant empathic resonance

Cl: Shall I love or hate him? I don’t know, I am confused ...

Th (primarily sensing the client’s confusion):
There is mixed feelings in you. Part of you experiences affection, part of you dislike and this is in you at one and the same time.
Company and confrontation

self awareness

experiencing

self resonance

empathic resonance

personal resonance

concordant

complementary

bracket off or 'build bridges'

symbolize

confront
Cl: Shall I love or hate him? I don’t know, I am confused ...

Th (sensing primarily that the client gradually has been growing tired of the person he talks about):

... or even forget about him?
complementary empathic resonance

Cl (hesitantly, tentatively): I feel somewhat sorry for him, poor guy ...

Th: You regret what happened, but you also seem to think it serves him right ... ?
Company and confrontation

self awareness

experiencing

self resonance

empathic resonance

personal resonance

concordant

complementary

bracket off
or 'build bridges'

symbolize

confront

dialogue
personal resonance

Cl: Shall I love or hate him? I don’t know, I am confused ...

Th (personally touched by the client’s bewilderment):

... which makes me aware how much I truly hope you come to the right decision this time.
personal resonance

Th: Do you want to see me next Tuesday at eleven?

Cl: Don’t know.

Th: ‘I just don’t know.’

(Silence of 49 seconds)

Th: Right at this point you just don’t know ... whether you want to say ‘yes’ to that or not, huh? ... I guess you feel so down and so awful that you just don’t know whether you can ... see that far ahead. Huh?

(Silence of 1 minute 20 seconds)

Th: I’m going to give you an appointment at that time because I’d sure like to see you then. (Writing an appointment slip.)
personal resonance

Cl (avoiding to respond to a tough question, the client has asked himself):

Big question – maybe I need another vodka before I can answer that.

Th: Dom – be here – be here drunk – but don’t play fucking games with me. Neither I nor you deserve that.

Cl (after a silence): You’re really serious about this, aren’t you?
Company and confrontation

self awareness

experiencing

self resonance empathic resonance personal resonance

concordant complementary

bracket off symbolize confront dialogue

or 'build bridges'
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Challenges for the therapist

- Not to be relationally negated by the self-protective processes of the client

- Struggling to meet the different parts of the client that may have come to personify different facets of the conflict and offer relational depth to all
Challenges for the pc therapist

- Fragile process (Warner, 2000)
- Dissociative process (Warner, 2000)
Challenges for the pc therapist

CLIENT’S ‘PROBLEMS’ → CLIENT’S ‘PROCESSES’ → CLIENT’S ‘EXISTENTIAL ‘PROCESS’
Challenges for the pc therapist

- Not to be relationally negated by the self-protective processes of the client

- Struggling to meet the different parts of the client that may have come to personify different facets of the conflict and offer relational depth to all
Models for describing change dynamics

- Rogers: Conflict between ‘the Self as it has actualized to this point’ and the ‘continuing promptings of the actualizing tendency’.

- Festinger: ‘Dissonance’ model.
II. Relational depth: The challenge of fully meeting the client

- Challenges for the therapist
- Criteria for working at relational depth
- The developmental agenda for the therapist
What confrontation & dialogue are not

- Expert behavior
- Process direction
- Satisfaction of the therapist’s needs
- Diagnosis
- Blaming, insinuating
- Attacking resistance
- ‘Self disclosure’
Criteria for working at relational depth

The overall criterion:

The therapist is devoting their whole awareness to the service of the Other.
Criteria for working at relational depth

- Existentiality
- Freedom of choice
- Immediacy
- Relationship-centeredness
- Mutuality
- Openness to risk
Criteria for working at relational depth

✓ Spontaneity
✓ Addressing all parts of the Self
✓ Co-reflectiveness
✓ Quality
✓ Contextuality
✓ Awareness of power
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The developmental agenda for the therapist

Broadening the self that is available in the therapy room – ‘configurations’.

Turning self-experiences into ‘existential touchstones’.
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