

The Decontamination and Expansion of the Therapists Adult Ego State.

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This paper is delivered under a conference theme of honouring our past, our people, the present and the future. While it is important to honour our past and our people this can be a very subjective and selective process affirming that which closely reflects our own construct of meaning. Our people and our past hold and embody a collective narrative that supports the business of psychotherapy. To hold the present with confidence and to project ourselves as a profession into the future it is useful to examine our history, the ground we stand on, not from our vested perspective but from the alternative narrative of those who critique us.

A treatment goal in transactional analysis is the decontamination of the Adult ego and the expansion of Adult ego state capacities. The paper will provide a platform to reflect on and expanded our underlying beliefs about the practice of psychotherapy. This will be done by introducing critiques of the counselling/psychotherapy industry to facilitate understanding of the mythology that underpins service delivery as a safeguard against fundamentalist creep.

Fundamentalist creep is the systemic drift towards fixed, radical or irrational ideas that are accentuated when individuals or systems are under pressure. Individual progression towards a fundamentalist position can also manifest out of professional or personal insecurity and the corresponding need for certainty. There appears to be an innate drive for certainty or the codification of belief, the construction of a preferred narrative which carries and embodies meaning and at times this can lead to reductionist or fundamentalist thinking. It is important as a profession that we assess our preferred narratives from time to time.

David Smail in his book "How to Survive Without Psychotherapy (1988) put it this way when reflecting on his doubts about the industry after a 30 year career.

"Doctors, behavioural scientists, and so on are, sadly perhaps but absolutely inevitably, prey to the same need to justify themselves and earn a living as the rest of society. We told stories the way we did mainly because that was the way we wanted it to be. That didn't mean that we were liars, charlatans or cheats merely that we were human beings like everyone else. But it did mean that the very foundations on which our assumptions about mental health were built needed to be re-examined." (Smail 1988. pg 11-12)

Fundamentalism is easily recognised in politics and religion but do we recognise it in our own profession. In Transactional Analysis (TA) terminology this is described as a contamination of the Adult ego state. What we think is rational and reasonable in relation to the practice of psychotherapy may be little more than a distorted myth.

An example of a political system captured by fundamentalist ideology is illustrated in New Zealand following the election of the Labour Government in