
Toward Restoring Some "Punch" in Counselling and Therapy Research and Practice: A Response to Martin

Frank Van Hesteren

University of Saskatchewan

Jack Martin (1995, this issue) has made a convincing case for approaching the study and practice of psychological counselling and therapy (hereafter psychotherapy). His proposal acknowledges the merits of the scientific method and the value of scientific knowledge and, at the same time, calls for a transcending of the scientific tradition in psychology in order to embrace other ways of knowing that are well suited to illuminating the distinctively human complexities of the therapeutic process. Martin has provided a clear explanation of the meaning of scientism in a therapeutic context and has revealed the pitfalls of a scientific approach to psychotherapy research and practice, with perhaps the most notable and unfortunate of these being the reduced and distorted understanding of therapeutic process and outcome that results from an unwarranted over-reliance upon causal explanations. Finally, Martin has unabashedly acknowledged the inherently moral nature of psychotherapy and has provided some clearly articulated reasons as to just why the work of counsellors and therapists might be considered as a moral enterprise.

There is much food for thought in this article, and numerous issues are raised which merit a considered response. In what follows, a few of these issues will be addressed under appropriate headings.

THE HERMENEUTIC ALTERNATIVE: RETREAT OR ADVANCE?

Martin (1995) acknowledges the potential merits and contributions of narrative/interpretive alternatives to positivistically oriented therapeutic research and points out that, according to one view, the hermeneutic option circumvents the causal "conundrum" by avoiding the generation and testing of causal theories. He then makes the following pivotal argument.

Such a reading places hermeneutic, narrative studies of psychotherapy outside of causal science. If this is really so, the hermeneutic alternative should, I believe, be seen as a nonscientific, yet fully legitimate form of humanistic scholarship. . . .
(pp. 299)

Martin goes on to suggest that, in his view, there is little to be gained by regarding narrative/interpretive inquiry as a kind of human science and advocates a hermeneutic "retreat from the field" as far as scientific aspirations are concerned. While I have some sympathy for what I under-

stand to be Martin's position, I would urge placing a moratorium on the "hermeneutic retreat" and working toward a broadened conception of therapeutic science that capitalizes upon the unique strengths of *both* positivistic *and* interpretive modes of inquiry.

A variety of scholars have persuasively argued that narrative/interpretive (i.e., qualitative) research can, indeed, be undertaken in the authentic spirit of science (e.g., Giorgi, 1970, 1988; Howard, 1986; Kvale, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1983). Recently, Peterson (1994) has aptly expressed how engagement in hermeneutic/phenomenological research reflects the essence of scientific exploration:

. . . I remain optimistic regarding the role of hermeneutics and the contributions of phenomenology in the social sciences. I believe that active and critically reflective engagement with the phenomena of human existence can yield a knowledge base that, although not absolutized in hypothetico-deductive, philosophically transcendental, or humanistic wishes, is nevertheless representative of practical living and is not whimsical, nor just sociologically or historically conditioned, or mind determined. (p. 176)

In making the case that narrative/interpretive approaches to therapeutic research constitute legitimate science, it is important to recognize that concepts such as validity and reliability are given due consideration within the qualitative orientation. Giorgi (1988), for example, has discussed the relevance of these concepts in both the "logical-empirical" and the phenomenological modes of inquiry but has made it clear that the meaning of the concepts vary as a function of the particular mode of inquiry in which they are considered. "What is common is the effort after proper evidence for knowledge claims, but the manner of achieving the evidence is different because of different assumptions which, in turn, inspire different criteria" (Giorgi, 1988, p. 175).

The position that narrative/interpretive approaches constitute legitimate science is further strengthened by Giorgi's (1994) recent observations regarding the capacity of the phenomenological paradigm to give rise to, and to account for, causal relations. In this regard, Giorgi (1994) has maintained that ". . . there is no intrinsic difficulty with making a causal account if that truly is the relation that renders the phenomenon intelligible" (p. 204).

In my estimation, the work by Martin Packer (1985) entitled, *The Structure of Moral Action: A Hermeneutic Study of Moral Conflict*, constitutes an impressive case in point that hermeneutic research does qualify as *bona fide* science. Based on Heidegger's "hermeneutic phenomenology," the study is one of the single most credible examples of which I am aware of the rigorous application of qualitative appropriate research criteria.

In conclusion, rather than sound the bugle for a "hermeneutic retreat" from the realm of science, I would suggest that those interested in the use of interpretive/qualitative methods in a therapeutic context take up the following challenge recently proffered by Steinar Kvale (1994):

In the long run the scientific merits of qualitative research will not be established by arguments of legitimation but by contributions of significant new knowledge about a linguistically constituted social world. (p. 169)

ACCOMMODATING MORAL EXPERIENCE AND MEETING THE SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE

I applaud Martin (1995) for having the courage and wisdom to forthrightly acknowledge that moral questions are integral to the therapeutic endeavour. It is my own conviction that moral issues raised by Martin having to do with “pursuing the client’s interests with respect to those of others” (p. 301), “necessary moral principles for the survival and prospering of humans and their communities” (p. 301), and “societal, cultural standards and practices with respect to what is good or right in relation to being and conduct” (p. 301) decidedly ought to be considered as relevant in a therapeutic context. In keeping with the spirit of these aspects of morality, I suggest that the concept of altruism constitutes what Martin has referred to as “an appropriate ethic for psychotherapy” (p. 301) (see Batson, 1991; Krebs & Van Hesteren, 1994). The relevance of the concept of altruism in terms of understanding and lending direction to the therapeutic process is increasingly being recognized in the counselling literature (e.g., Brazier, 1993; Kottler, 1993). For example, Brazier (1993), in *Beyond Carl Rogers*, has written a chapter entitled, “The Necessary Condition is Love: Going Beyond the Self in the Person-Centred Approach.” According to Brazier (1993):

. . . our view of human nature does not have to be centred on self and the actualization of self but might, in many ways more usefully, be grounded in the idea of a need *to* love rather than the need *for* love. . . . The argument here is not so much about what should be included in our theorizing as about what should be considered as fundamental. The intention . . . is to suggest the possibility that it is the altruistic orientation which is fundamental and that “self”-development may be a derivative of this, as opposed to the commonly held notion that it is self-development which is fundamental and that the social virtues may then arise as a by-product. (p. 77)

Over the course of the past several years, Dennis Krebs and I have been investigating the personality dynamics of highly altruistic people and how the human capacity for caring evolves to become more extensive and embracing of others over the life-span (Krebs & Van Hesteren, 1994; Van Hesteren, 1992). It seems to me that the kinds of moral questions identified by Martin as being of possible relevance in a therapeutic context can be reflected upon, more fully comprehended, and meaningfully addressed within the integrative developmental model of altruism that we have proposed.

While Martin has been quite clear about the kinds of questions and issues that may be encompassed by the moral domain, I would be interested in learning about his views regarding the place of spirituality in the therapeutic scheme of things. An acknowledgment of the signifi-

cance of spirituality is implicit in Martin's admonition that the arts and humanities should be embraced in the service of addressing the moral aspects of therapy, but there appears to be no direct discussion of spirituality, per se, in his article. The spiritual dimension is considered to be central to the "wellness" philosophy currently being advocated by some for the counselling profession (Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). Additionally, it is evident that individuals involved in psychotherapy commonly are dealing with religious/spiritual issues (Lannert, 1991) and that the "majority of practicing psychologists, though not involved in organized religion, consider spirituality to be important in their personal lives and their clinical work" (Elkins, 1995, p. 80). In light of these considerations, it seems to me that the time has come to squarely meet the challenge of more proactively acknowledging and accommodating the spiritual dimension in the practice and study of psychotherapy and in the context of counsellor education programs (cf. Kelly, 1994).

CONCLUSION

Tom Greening (1994), editor of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, tells of an experience he and a friend had with Rollo May not long before Rollo's death. Rollo was reminiscing about the "rich heritage" of humanistic psychology but, at the same time, lamenting the current tendency to lapse sometimes into "New Age flakiness" and "arid intellectual deconstructionism and detached human science scholarship." Finally, Rollo lent expression to this considerable frustration by asking the question, "Where is the punch?"

Martin (1995) has provided a valuable service by compelling psychological counselling and therapy practitioners and researchers to become more reflective about the nature of the therapeutic process and ways of facilitating and studying it. His article is a breath of fresh air that has served to revitalize my sense of optimism that psychotherapy research *can* be meaningfully undertaken through reliance upon ways of knowing that avoid the hazards of scientism and make possible the discernment of the human faces (Konner, 1982) of those involved in the therapeutic experience.

Thanks for the "punch," Jack!

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About the Author

Frank Van Hesteren is a professor in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Saskatchewan. Frank has a longstanding interest in phenomenological-hermeneutic perspectives on counselling research. In recent years, he has been particularly interested in developing "reflective practitioner" approaches to teacher and counsellor education and exploring the potential of altruism as an animating morality for teaching and counselling practice.

Address correspondence to: Frank Van Hesteren, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 0X1.