

# Editorial

We are delighted to introduce this special issue on the politics of psychotherapy research and I (Keith Tudor) am delighted to introduce and welcome my colleague and friend Dr Brian Rodgers to the journal and to thank him for collaborating with me on this special issue, which, again, comprises articles both by authors who have previously published with *Psychotherapy and Politics International* (Ashcroft, Carey, Mikahere-Hall, and Carter), and two who are new to the journal (Donald and Rodgers).

Psychotherapy has a long history of research, beginning with case study research, reported not only by Sigmund Freud (1901/1953, 1909/1955, 1911/1958) but also by John Watson (Watson & Rayner, 1920), and Carl Rogers (1942). However, in terms of the current focus on “evidence-based practice,” case study research is ironically considered the lowest form of evidence (see Harbour & Miller, 2001)—and herein lies one aspect of the politics of psychotherapy research: the question of what constitutes evidence and who decides this. There are, of course, many aspects to the politics of such research and, indeed, that was part of what motivated us to propose and edit this issue.

Interestingly, as we planned and put together this special issue, we noticed certain parallels with the journey and experience of research itself: we put out a call for papers (participants); had a small initial response; and then approached others (akin to snowball sampling); we had “participants” who agreed to write something but then didn’t show up, and others who, for various reasons, dropped out. Of these, there were more women than men—and, indeed, the relative participation of men and women in psychotherapy research would be worthy of future research study. Nevertheless, despite the usual vicissitudes of publishing/research, we are delighted to present the articles in this issue, which we think reflect some important aspects of various discussions regarding research about and in psychotherapy.

Anton Ashcroft’s article, “The politics of research,” introduces us to numerous fallacies in the field of psychological research, and critiques the way in which these have distorted our understanding of a number of commonly accepted “facts” which, in fact, are “beliefs” rather than facts. Through a series of well-documented examples, we are led to see how easily results are taken out of context, inadvertently misrepresented, and even intentionally manipulated. The author posits that, rather than these being a few isolated incidences, all published research is likely to contain flaws or biases to some degree, and challenges us to be more discerning and critical as consumers. He sets the scene nicely for us to question research, including his own and, by implication, the articles in this special edition, to discern what political biases and manipulations they too include.

In “Improving psychotherapy effectiveness,” Ian Donald and Timothy Carey identify a number of limitations of the current approach to evaluating the efficacy of psychotherapy. They propose an expanded paradigm for evaluating the effectiveness of psychotherapy research through a multidimensional, integrative methodology for clinical decision making. By combining indicators of magnitude, rates and reliability of change, along with efficiency of treatment, the authors identify the potential to construct a standardised “index” to allow direct comparisons of psychotherapies. Whilst acknowledging the role of qualitative and quantitative paradigms, this approach would seem to be flirting somewhat with neoliberalism and the drive for greater “efficiency.” One wonders here about the potential for this type of approach to lead to the indexing of service providers similar to the UK’s National Health Service’s hospital league tables, with all their associated controversy (Cribb, 1999; Adab, Rouse, Mohammed, & Marshall, 2002;).

In “The trouble with numbers,” Brian takes a more detailed look at how the numbers used in quantitative outcomes research are obtained, and identifies some fundamental flaws in using standardised outcome measures. He leads us through a number of critiques of their methodological, sociopolitical, and technical flaws. Whilst provocative in its challenge, the article leaves us (deliberately) in a state of limbo, perhaps somewhere between ideological and

“real” worlds—in the sense that, increasingly, administrative realities require practitioners to provide evidence of efficacy. How we respond to this, especially from a critical perspective, require us—and others—to step beyond the dominant paradigm of outcomes research.

The vast majority of psychotherapy research is based on theories and assumptions – ontological, epistemological, and methodological—rooted in the Western intellectual tradition. In her article “Constructing research from an indigenous kaupapa Māori perspective,” Alayne Mikahere-Hall provides an alternative and challenging discourse to that of the dominant Western paradigm: one that steps outside the mainstream and, indeed, inhabits a different stream. This has a particularly contemporary relevance for, as this issue was going to press, there is further debate in Aotearoa New Zealand about who “owns” water, a debate that is challenged by the indigenous perspective “Ko au te awa; ko te awa ko au” | I am the river, and the river is me. Mikahere-Hall questions the fundamental ability of Western research paradigms to offer anything of worth to Māori, given the historical and ongoing experiences of colonisation. Instead, we are presented with a “mana wāhine” methodology which situates (the) research historically, culturally and politically in a Māori context. Also, and provocatively, in the article, we are challenged to “experience” being excluded through the use of non-English language.

Finally, in his discussion of “Ethics and Research,” Phil Carter invites us to cultivate a “living ethic” in relation to psychotherapy research, by which we should consider the complexity of consent, and the implications of culture, reciprocity in relationship, choice, rights and power in relation to research ethics. The author leaves us with a vision of the potential to apply the dynamics of psychotherapy to research ethics, that is, of coming into a living encounter of reciprocal relationships to embody an ethos of mutuality, curiosity and heart. In the face of an increasingly risk-averse and litigious society, this is a call for and to a more humanising research endeavour.

We hope you are stimulated by this special issue, are provoked (if called forth), get or continue to be interested in research, and (of course!) feel inspired to conduct research and/or write about research, and to contribute to further debates about the politics of psychotherapy journals—in this and other organs.

Earlier this year, I (Keith) introduced some new Associate Editors, one of whom is Maxine Sheets-Johnstone. Although Maxine is known to regular readers of the journal (see Sheets-Johnstone, 2008, 2010, 2012), she has taken up my invitation to introduce herself by means of writing an article, and has done so in a creative and provocative way, with a piece which invokes Wotan, the Norse God not only of storm and frenzy but also of passion, and who, as both magician and artist, stands as a positive (i)mage for the political psychotherapist.

Finally, in this issue, and thanks to the good offices of the Reviews Editors, Deborah Lee and Gottfried Heuer, we have four reviews: of Freud's “Outstanding” Colleague/Jung's” Twin Brother”: *The Suppressed Psychoanalytic and Political Significance of Otto Gross* by Gottfried M. Heuer, reviewed by Babak Fozooni; *Therapy and the Counter-Tradition: The Edge of Philosophy* edited by Manu Bazzano and Julie Webb, reviewed by Bernie Neville; *Bereavement: Personal Experiences and Clinical Reflections* edited by Salman Akhtar and Gurmeet S. Kanwal, reviewed by Kamalamani; and *Unbroken* by Madeleine Black, reviewed by Frances Basset and Deborah A. Lee.

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