

# Rethinking practitioner roles

We write as counselling psychologists who find ourselves working in traditional clinical, forensic, paediatric and academic contexts. This experience has led us to query the role, utility and validity of the historical and current taxonomy of our profession.

In 2009 the Health and Care Professions Council became the statutory regulator of practitioner psychologists. This process involved consultation of key stakeholders in order to identify who should be regulated and the knowledge and skills that would determine the standards of proficiency for practitioner psychologists. An unintended consequence of this was the cementing of historical role titles and reinforcement of tacit beliefs related to an arguably outdated discourse of difference.

The demand on psychology appears to have now shifted focus going beyond the interdisciplinary boundaries defined by the parameters of the service organisation and the needs of their client group. *New Ways of Working* (BPS, 2007) saw the traditional roles expanding in favour of psychological consultancy in multidisciplinary teams, not least due to a shortage of skilled psychologists available service-wide.

Unintentionally the BPS added to the confusion in 2011 by putting in place a requirement for all clinical psychology roles to be opened up to counselling psychologists. With this came an increase in the 'Clinical/Counselling' title being integrated into job descriptions and job specifications. The move though did not reflect in the roles of health and forensic psychologists.

The clinical reality for psychology is rather different, with client needs that often can be met by more than one area of speciality. For example, a client's anxiety in the area of physicality might be addressed either by a health, clinical or counselling psychologist. How do we define our area of expertise? More significantly, how relevant are these labels to clients' own phenomenological experiences.

In the workplace we increasingly employ a biopsychosocial perspective in the organisational and clinical setting. Through an understanding of systemic models we engage with human function and distress aiming to understand psychological manifestations of struggle in the wider context of the lived experience. If we are seeking an integration of therapeutic modalities with a view to achieving a more holistic and responsive service for our clients, should we not also be holding the same lens up to ourselves? Perhaps the question is: Why at a time when psychology is under increased threat from budget cuts do we not attempt to rethink our role?

In the meantime the BPS takes cautious steps in engagement in an International Declaration on Core Competences in Professional Psychology (BPS, 2015). With a concern being raised that the International Declaration 'as it currently stands,



## Don't ignore biological factors

I am unsure which part of my letter ('Keep looking for biological causes', February, 2016) was unclear to Richard Hassall ('Schizophrenia and biology', Letters, March 2016) and made him think I was perhaps offering a defence of

the scientific or clinical validity of schizophrenia, or otherwise commenting on 'whether or not schizophrenia is a distinct illness with a biological basis'.

Richard may have missed my point. I was merely

advocating for continued tolerance of the potentially diverse origins of future advances in the understanding and care of people with 'functional' mental health conditions – as exemplified, so strikingly in this instance,

in the encephalitis/psychosis/ (diagnosis of) schizophrenia findings. I also wondered if there is a small group within our profession that is becoming intolerant of such issues: it sounds like Richard, for one, thinks there might be.

contribute

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## A therapy for each client

I was reading Gemma Broadstock's letter 'Tailoring the treatment' (March 2016), where she movingly described how she designed an app to help her brother through his feelings of anxiety and pointlessness because his CBT 'homework' failed to engage him. Her aim was to signpost the need for treatments to take into account the individuality of each person, especially young people. Then I read a sentence that made me jump

straight out of my armchair and onto my PC: 'Whilst I appreciate that developing a therapy for each client would be time-consuming and impractical...'. Well, good news, Gemma – this therapy already exists and it's called integrative psychotherapy (or integrative counselling psychology).

I have to admit it makes my blood boil to see how much CBT has become a synonym for counselling

through its near monopolistic use by the NHS, and how little awareness there is of alternatives. I trained as an integrative psychotherapist to learn from many modalities, such as CBT, psychodynamics, gestalt, transactional analysis, existentialism, phenomenology, mindfulness, precisely because I do not believe that 'one size fits all'.

Change happens not when we apply one method or technique to all but when the

client is the starting point and feels seen and understood as a unique individual. I say it is high time our accrediting professional bodies such as the UKCP and BACP, or ourselves as practitioners, make people like Gemma aware that what they wish for is already out there, although unfortunately mostly unavailable on the NHS.

**Corinne Lowry**  
Barnet  
Hertfordshire

## Felt presence and the 'hard problem'

One class of those experiencing a 'felt presence' is missing from Alderson-Day's otherwise excellent review ('The silent companions', April 2016) – the category of those *intentionally* cultivating such experiences. Arzy and Idel (2015) have drawn attention to a subset of Jewish mystics who pursued practices clearly designed to induce alterations in the sense of self, culminating in some cases with mystics experiencing autoscapy, whereby they converse with their double standing in front of them.

These, or similar, practices are not confined to Jewish mysticism, being found throughout diverse traditions, and are probably also related to more recreational use of some psychedelics. Whilst the neurocognitive aspects of such states may, as Arzy and Idel propose, be common across all cases – mystical and pathological – the importance of including this category of those intentionally seeking alterations in their experience lies in what they contribute to our understanding of the self. Far from being a pathological disruption of those processes that bring about the everyday sense of self, these mystical felt presences might be a means for enriching our grasp of the role self plays in our lives.

The most gripping of all felt presences is indeed that of the everyday sense of self. Yet *why* any sense of presence should exist remains a mystery – it is the core of the 'hard problem' of consciousness, as articulated by Chalmers (1995). Silberstein and Chemero (2015) have argued for a neutral monist understanding of consciousness, i.e. that both mind and

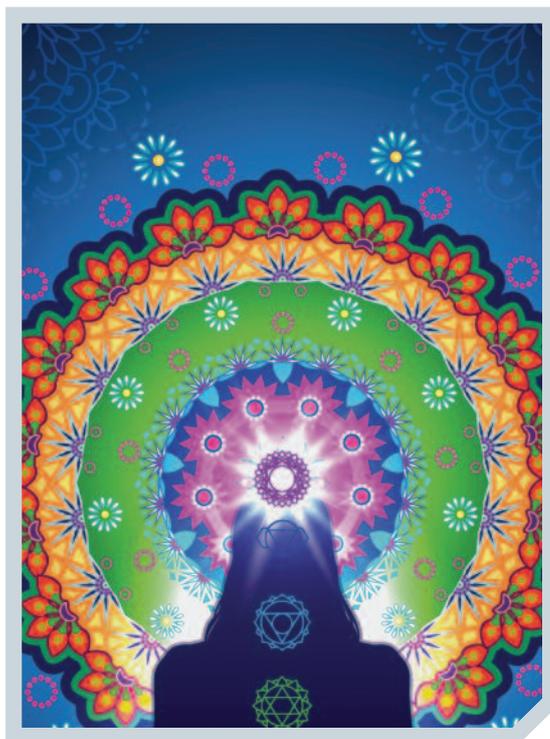
matter derive from a more basic foundation that is neither one nor the other (hence 'neutral'). Many have made such claims; of interest in our context is the suggestion by Silberstein and Chemero that the neutral quality is best captured by the term 'presence'. As Seager puts it, 'The neutral monist claim that it [presence] forms the bedrock of reality is surprisingly powerful and fertile, and may yet help us understand reality and our place within it' (cited in Silberstein and Chemero, 2013, p.192). I would argue that this is the critical point about mystics and shamans exploring alterations in the felt presence of self: they delve more deeply into that 'bedrock of reality' than do those not so motivated, bringing knowledge that enriched the cultures to which they belonged. And, to quote Silberstein and Chemero, 'Given that presence is fundamental, it cannot be defined in terms of other concepts, of either a material or mental nature' (p.193).

**B. Les Lancaster**

Past Chair, BPS Transpersonal Psychology Section  
Emeritus Professor of Transpersonal Psychology, Liverpool John Moores University

### References

- Arzy, S. & Idel, M. (2015). *Kabbalah: A neurocognitive approach to mystical experiences*. London: Yale University Press.
- Chalmers, D. (1995). Facing up to the problem of consciousness. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2(3), 200–219.
- Silberstein, M. & Chemero, A. (2015). Extending neutral monism to the hard problem. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 22(3–4), 181–194.



Mystics and shamans delve more deeply into that 'bedrock of reality' than do those not so motivated

## Shy of reward

I understood what the letter titled 'Discipline in schools' (February 2016) was getting at. Those who misbehave in class are likely to be encouraged to behave better by the incentive of getting their names up on a board via a joint classroom reward system, creating almost an environment for healthy competition with the generally good students who can get their names on the board rather easily. Thus, class behaviour as a whole is likely to be improved and control for the teacher can become easier.

However, throughout the letter I could not help but think back to my own childhood in primary and secondary

education, where such a reward system was used in class, and the idea that while behaviour is improved by such a system, there is negative effect on those remaining children in class who are well behaved yet shy. Being one of those children myself, I remember always feeling inadequate after class at not being able to have the confidence to get my name up on the board. In fact, the lack of confidence was enhanced by such a regime, meaning that I felt class feeling negative and deflated. I have seen this occur many times in classes having worked with children for over six years in a classroom environment as my family run a Saturday school. Even

with other incentives such as stickers, etc. I saw that the idea of competing with the more confident members of the class for the same goal was too intimidating for them and they often left class crying because they remained without such praise or sense of achievement.

Perhaps there is a reward system that can still engage the students without amplifying the insecurities of shyer pupils or without causing any negative effects at all? Maybe even something that could encourage these pupils to contribute in class is possible.

**Alexis Baker**  
Tonbridge, Kent

## Organising our branches

The role of BPS Branches has recently been under consideration. There is current progress towards the devolution of the Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scotland Branches to new forms. In the meanwhile the English Branches survive as diverse structures – some progressive, some somnolent.

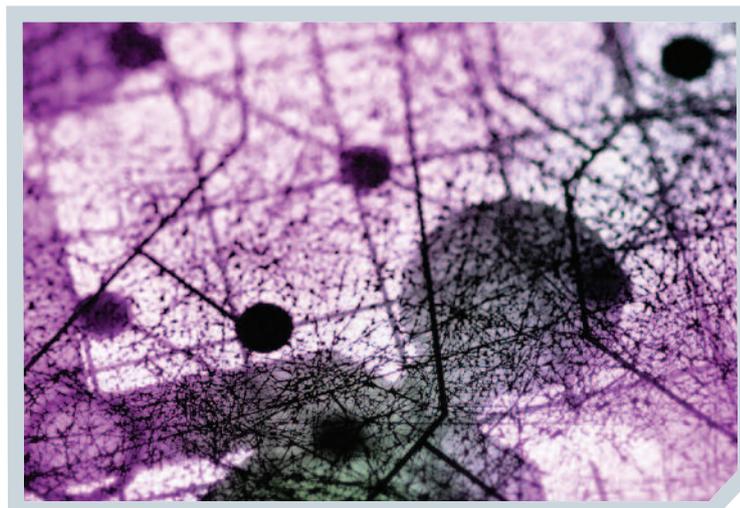
The goals of the BPS are well detailed, but the structure and associated processes of the BPS in support of these goals are less well defined. As a bureaucratic organisation, the BPS is to a large extent supported by committees; committees being groups of individuals sharing common interests and an understanding of the remit of the committee. However, individual committee members' goals may differ. Committees mainly influence an organisation's policy, but do not necessarily promote it, and are often slow to respond to matters of concern related to the committee remit.

Committees are unlikely to constitute a team. In contrast, Branch team members have shared goals, assigned roles, and aim together for the dynamic satisfaction of these goals. Moreover, a Branch team dynamically liaises on a daily basis with psychologists, other professionals, and the general public in order to promote BPS policy within their geographical area; that should be their specific role within the BPS.

Importantly, the nature of team skills is different from that of individual or committee participatory skills; an individual may be highly educated and experienced in their own skill, but that expertise does not necessarily morph into team-related skills as needed by Branches – this is not obviously considered by the BPS.

Developing on a model on team properties (namely, the '7Cs' of teamwork as Command, Control, Communication, Co-ordination, Co-operation, Cohesion, Cybernation: Swezey & Salas, 1992), a related article to this letter has been published in the spring 2016 issue of *South West Review* (available through the BPS Shop at <http://tinyurl.com/jg4j9su>). From reasoning based on the '7Cs' model a set of 10 suggestions were offered in the article on how Branches should be improved, in sum that:

1. The society should carefully delegate control to Branches.
2. A Branch team should be tasked to act dynamically and directly as the BPS area representative to the general public.



3. Team training is made available through the BPS and for selected members of the BPS Branches.
4. The BPS introduces an improved society communication protocol that is trained and effective.
5. Video conferencing facilities are supplied to Branch Hubs.
6. A Branch should have a single point of contact at the BPS with relation to Branch matters.
7. The BPS yearly monies to the Branch should be based on an agreed business plan for that Branch.
8. The Branch Secretary is a paid post.
9. The Branch Secretary is provided with access to a dedicated work space with commensurate role equipment.
10. Branch team members, particularly student volunteers, should be rewarded for good contributions by some form of BPS acknowledgement.

### Iain Macleod

Registered Occupational Psychologist  
Chair BPS South West of England Branch

### Reference

Swezey, R.W. & Salas, E. (1992). *Teams: Their training and performance*. Stamford, CT: Ablex Publishing.

## Feedback needed

I decided to write this letter after reading the advice Roxane L. Gervais gave to aspiring psychologists in the latest issue of *The Psychologist* (March, 2016): 'Network, volunteer, get involved with the BPS. *You will always find someone willing to help you to progress your career*' (emphasis added).

I became a member of the BPS from my first year of undergraduate study. I attended conferences, talks, and was eager to show my genuine interest and enthusiasm for the field by approaching researchers and professionals. I sent dozens of emails following such networking events, expressing my availability to work or volunteer on their projects. I still wonder if anybody read them.

After having applied to a CAP course (the Scottish equivalent of IAPT courses) and being unsuccessful on the interview, I requested feedback on my performance. The email with the feedback came three months later and it consisted of five sentences of general statements, including the famous '...however, on the day there were candidates who were

able to demonstrate stronger understanding and responses to all questions'. After over two weeks of mulling over whether it would be appropriate to ask for more detailed information, I finally sent an email requesting further clarification. I am still waiting for a reply.

Following my experience of applying for several assistant psychologist jobs and failing the interview, I believe that honest, personalised feedback is rather an exception. A rare, fortunate opportunity and the only thing, apart from hard work, that can actually make you a better applicant.

I don't believe I am entitled to receive anything. I am aware that competition is fierce and the pressure is high on candidates and employers equally. I am trying my best to follow every piece of advice I receive. My message to employers and interview panels: please take the time and send your feedback to that oblivious aspiring psychologist. Be that helping hand. The silence is earsplitting.

**Anca Panescu**  
Glasgow

## Blog on

I much enjoyed the piece on blogging in the April edition of *The Psychologist* ('Welcome to blogademia') but would like to emphasise that you do not need to be a computer whizz-kid to blog. I find it simple to write blogs in conventional text and submit them to the LSE Impact of Social Sciences Blog ([impactofsocialsciences@lse.ac.uk](mailto:impactofsocialsciences@lse.ac.uk)). Here all the text settings, including the addition of pictures, and links to any papers you refer to, are done for you and, since this blog reaches over 50,000 readers a month, why not take a look?

**James Hartley**  
Keele

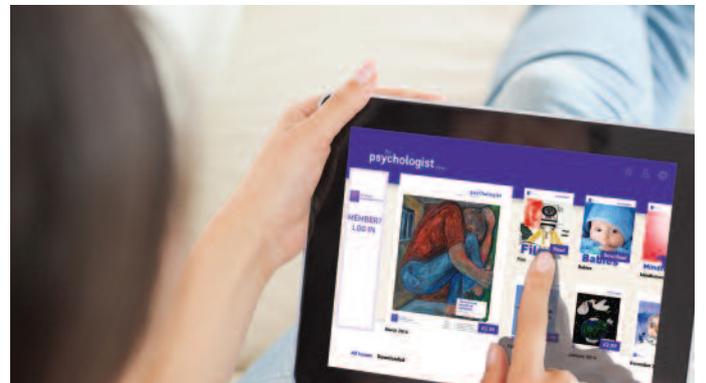
## obituary

### John F. Cole (1941–2016)

Many former colleagues and associates in the world of education will be saddened to learn of the passing of John Cole at the age of 74 on 11 March 2016. His terminal cancer was diagnosed shortly after Christmas, and John died in his sleep at his home in Castle Cary.

John's service with Somerset County Council as an educational psychologist was long and distinguished, spanning the years 1971 to 1995, first in a senior position at Yeovil and later as Head of Service. Apart from overseeing and steering the expansion of the service during some turbulent years in education, John developed a specialist interest in the needs of hearing-impaired children and later took a managerial responsibility in the development of this service also. After leaving the Somerset service John worked as Head of a Special School for two years before developing a consultancy, combining this with his many outside interests and extensive travelling with his beloved wife, Trina.

**David Knapman**  
Taunton



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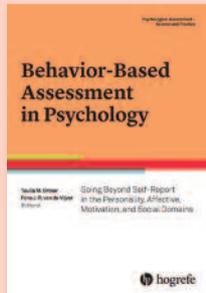
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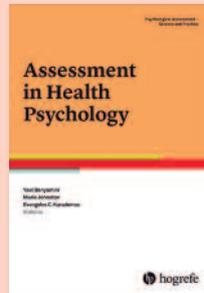
Psychological Assessment – Science and Practice, Vol. 1

2015, vi + 234 pp., £ 36.00 / € 44.95

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Yael Benyamini / Marie Johnston / Evangelos C. Karademas (Eds.)

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Psychological Assessment – Science and Practice, Vol. 2

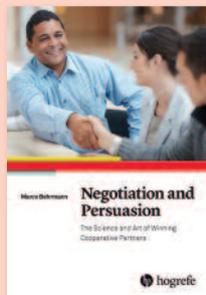
2016, vi + 346 pp.

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This book presents and discusses the best and most appropriate assessment methods and instruments for all specific areas that are central for health psychologists. A unique feature of this book, which brings together leading authorities on health psychology assessment, is its emphasis on the bidirectional link between theory and practice. It is addressed to masters and doctoral students in health psychology, to all those who teach health psychology, researchers from other disciplines, including clinical psychology, health promotion, and public health, as well as to health policy makers and other healthcare practitioners.



Marco Behrmann

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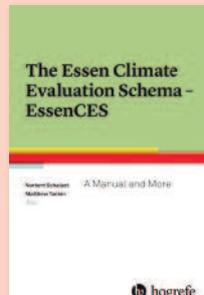
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Norbert Schalast / Matthew Tonkin (Eds.)

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