

THE SCIENCE OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

ISSUE 100

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EDITORIAL

Celebrating Our 100th Issue

100 issues! How about that! Taking on the role of editor has been one of the greatest good fortunes of my career. It is a task but not a chore. I look forward to the next 100.

My gratitude for this good fortune and for all the benefits that the Science of Psychotherapy brings to readers of the magazine, listeners to the podcast, and members of the Academy goes to Matthew Dahlitz who brought this amazing project into being. His dedication and sacrifices have meant that we are here, now, at the 100th issue. Over the past decade Matthew has shepherded the growth and development of the Science of Psychotherapy and has also been the steward of the invaluable resources that are now an extensive and growing archive of knowledge and learning for everyone concerned with mental health and therapeutic practice. The podcast is a weekly pleasure to thousands of listeners and the Academy can proudly boast more than 600 core units of education with access to over 1000 videos, articles, and documentaries, which have been curated into hundreds of hours of ongoing education with CEU certificates. And more is being added every day! Members are treated to a cornucopia of riches at a price that is unrivalled in the online space and now non-members can purchase individual courses to satisfy their specific interests.

This 100th issue is more than I could have imagined. There is not enough space in the editorial to precis each contribution, but I can tell you it is an extraordinary reading experience. The list of contributors is proudly displayed on the cover and there are even more who have sent articles that could not fit into this issue, but you will find in upcoming issues. The 100th is, in effect, a double issue, with contributions from extraordinary people expressing their current ideas and research through articles, commentaries, and opinion pieces. We also share some of the messages of congratulations we received from special friends of the Science of Psychotherapy.

I know there is plenty to fascinate and stimulate curiosity and wonder, so, please enjoy our 100th. Be well, stay safe, and may your world be full of love and joy.

RICHARD HILL | EDITOR

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Therapy in the 21st Century: One Step Forward, One Step Backwards, One Step to the Side

Michael D. Yapko

Therapy in the 21st Century:
One Step Forward,
One Step Backwards,
One Step to the Side.



A Commentary
by Michael D. Yapko

LAST WORD

Almost three decades ago, a powerful book by Jungian analyst James Hillman and newspaper columnist Michael Ventura exploded into the awareness of the psychotherapy community, challenging therapists to be more socially aware and politically engaged rather than focusing only on helping individuals. They pointed out the folly of continuing to try to help people adjust to ever-increasingly crazy world circumstances rather than trying to improve the circumstances themselves. The provocative title of their book is *We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy—And the World's Getting Worse*. Now well into the second hundred years of psychotherapy, has the world, indeed, gotten worse? The answer, of course, isn't simple or one-dimensional; some things have, indeed, gotten worse, even *much* worse. Other things have continued pretty much as they did before, and some things have gotten better, even *much* better. One step forward, one step backwards, and another step to the side...

There's so much going on in the world right now that deserves careful and serious consideration. But the major premise of this short commentary is that the psychotherapy profession has, in my opinion, still been too ambivalent about taking strong and meaningful positions about some of the most serious social and mental health issues we face. Have we fallen into the trap of thinking we must be neutral in perspective and must necessarily wait until we have enough studies to confirm so much of what we already know? Other times the profession holds back out of the traditional perspective that says we shouldn't take sides in therapy – or in politics or social controversies. I have come to think that professionally sanctioned passivity will eventually be seen as an evasion of social responsibility by a group well positioned to make a meaningful difference.

Despite some significant improvements in our ability to address mental health issues, national and international surveys reveal that people are suffering emotional distress in higher numbers now than ever before. Governments are beginning to recognize the need for and are prioritizing mental health services by funding more programs and increasing the availability of services. This translates to more psychotherapists being trained, more being employed and available to consumers, and more emphasis in the media encouraging people to get the help they may need. This increased emphasis on mental health as a public health issue is a good, progressive, critically important step... but it misses the point I'm hoping to make in this brief commentary.

As psychotherapists we are trained to do therapy. We are taught how to help people

come to terms with the challenges they face and the adversities they have suffered. We are also educated as to how we can help people develop their potential and lead worthy lives. As a clinician myself, I have enormous respect for the profession and all those who are willing and able to compassionately get knee-deep into the swamp of people's lives with the goal of providing recovery and healing. But one of the most troublesome aspects of the practice of psychotherapy is that it's essentially a "mop-up" operation, a means of helping people "clean up" the messes of the life they lead. To put it another way, by the time someone comes in for therapy the problems already exist, the hurts are already there.

The demand for mental health services is great, the wait for help can be unreasonably long in some places, and the need for helpful resources keeps growing. How can we possi-



bly keep up? In my view, the focus of our field needs to expand far more broadly and deeply on the critically important issue of prevention. Can prevention work, is it possible? Yes, yes, yes! Prevention has been practiced in some limited contexts and has been shown to work and work well: we already have the means to prevent new onsets of anxiety and depression as ample numbers of studies affirm.

Where would we begin if we were going to prioritize prevention? I think the first place to start is in our clinical training programs. In addition to the typical and necessary emphasis on teaching treatment techniques, we can also teach aggressive ways to implement prevention strategies. More than that, we can create training sites where students or budding professionals can have experience with developing and implementing prevention strategies with

the same zeal we have had for placing them in clinical treatment contexts.

Where might we begin to integrate prevention programs on a large scale and with the greatest degree of impact? My answer: the educational system, ideally beginning as early as when children first enter school and then continuing onwards as a foundation of the learning process. Beyond academic subjects, I believe the learning process must be more personal and pragmatic: how to develop social skills, problem solving skills, coping skills, self-regulation skills, and other key life skills. School should be personally relevant!

Above all, I believe the educational system needs to prioritize one specific skill that it must impart if people are to live well, namely critical thinking. The lack of critical thinking skills gives rise to a greater vulnerability to misinfor-



mation and disinformation, leading to generations of people making choices and decisions with inadequate or incorrect information. Ultimately, whole societies splinter as a result. When people don't know how to anticipate the consequences of their actions, whether a corporation, government, or individual, the lack of critical thinking, including the capacity for foresight, gives rise to poor decision making with often tragic consequences. When people don't grasp why science matters or how to gather and use credible information, the lack of critical thinking increases their vulnerability to magical thinking. Vitaly important social skills that make it possible for people to get along with each in more productive ways rely on critical thinking skills as well; how important is it to know that others don't think or feel the way that you do and all that means for promoting civil human interaction?

Can this really be done? The answer is yes, and, in fact, Finland is already doing it. Finland has prioritized information literacy and strong critical thinking skills in its school curricula for nearly a decade. In math classes students learn how people can lie using statistics. In history classes students study and learn from propaganda campaigns. In art classes students learn how images and symbolism can be manipulated to provoke extreme reactions. Finland is taking the lead on this critically important issue that affects all of us and the benefits have already become evident. Finland, next door to Russia, has managed to successfully resist the constant bombardment of Russian disinformation the Finnish people are exposed to. In fact, the Media Literacy Index by the European Policies Initiative of the Open Society Institute – Sofia – assesses the resilience potential to misinformation and disinformation in 35 European



countries. Finland is ranked at the top of the list and is considered best equipped to withstand the impact of so-called fake news (see www.osis.bg to review relevant publications).

Psychotherapists can take all they know about how people learn, grow, develop empathy, evolve foresight, build resiliency, develop problem solving and coping skills, and build these and even more life skills into academic programs. In the limited places such programs have been implemented, they have significantly reduced mental health problems. But to do this we need to get past the typical objections people raise: the lack of money for prevention programs, the excessive burdens on teachers to not only teach their subjects but also be mental health advocates, and the conflicts that arise about whose values should be taught when people are educated to adopt perspectives that are value laden. These potential obstacles can be

overcome once prevention becomes the priority and critical thinking skills are emphasized.

Prevention may be a “hard sell” as people seem to be innately reactive rather than proactive. But I’m convinced that until we generate more critical thinkers than believers, people who have learned how to think rather than what to think, the societal and individual issues that divide and hurt people will continue to increase the numbers of people suffering. Education is how we empower people to know the differences between facts and feelings and develop the foresight to know that this action will lead to that consequence. Psychotherapists can rethink the cost of our social and political neutrality and our narrow focus on treatment so that one day soon someone can write the book titled, *We’ve Had Many Years of Prevention and the World’s Gotten Better*.



Michael D. Yapko, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist and marriage and family therapist residing in Southern California. He is internationally recognized for his work in developing strategic, outcome-focused psychotherapies, the advanced clinical applications of hypnosis, and active, short-term non-pharmacological treatments of depression. Dr. Yapko is the author of 16 books and editor of three others, as well as the author of dozens of book chapters and journal articles. His most recent works, *Process-Oriented Hypnosis* and *The Discriminating Therapist*, highlight some of his most significant and unique contributions to the fields of psychotherapy and clinical hypnosis.

His textbook, *Trancework: An Introduction to the Practice of Clinical Hypnosis* (now in its 5th edition) is a classic in the field of hypnosis. www.yapko.com