

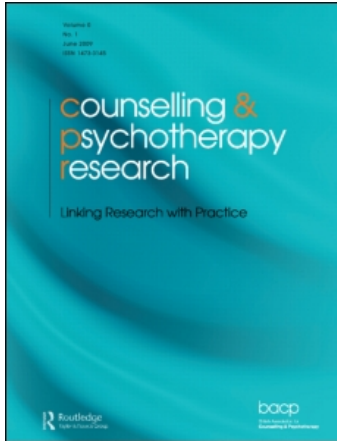
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## Counselling and Psychotherapy Research

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713734893>

### The challenge of becoming an integrative counsellor: The trainee's perspective

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First published on: 25 June 2010

**To cite this Article** Lowndes, Lisa and Hanley, Terry(2010) 'The challenge of becoming an integrative counsellor: The trainee's perspective', *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 10: 3, 163 – 172, First published on: 25 June 2010 (iFirst)

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/14733141003751614

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14733141003751614>

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SPECIAL SECTION RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The challenge of becoming an integrative counsellor: The trainee's perspective

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### Abstract

*Aim:* Integrative therapeutic practice is commonplace within the UK. Counsellors and psychotherapists increasingly report working in this way and numerous training courses have developed which advocate such practice. Despite its popularity, researchers have paid little attention to the impact that such training has upon students. This study therefore explores newly qualified counsellors' reflections of undertaking professional training in integrative counselling. *Design:* Newly qualified counsellors were invited to take part in a focus group to discuss their training experiences. Two groups were held involving a total of seven people. The data generated was analysed using Grounded Theory. *Findings:* The core-category 'The challenge of becoming an integrative counsellor' was identified. Embedded within this were four sub-categories: (1) 'training issues', (2) 'applied issues', (3) 'the development of an integrative theory and identity', and (4) 'the impact of integrative training post qualification'. Key findings include the willingness of trainees to tolerate theoretical ambiguity and the discomfort that surrounded not belonging to a pure paradigm community. *Discussion:* Recommendations are made that trainers and practice supervisors are mindful of the distinct struggles that integrative trainees encounter. Additionally, in response to the isolation that some trainees report, greater use of peer support networks is encouraged.

**Keywords:** counsellor training; therapeutic integration; the skilled helper; pluralism; tolerating ambiguity

### Introduction

There are a vast array of approaches to counselling and psychotherapy (e.g. Freedheim, 1992; Karasu, 1986), and in recent years this has led to a heightened interest in therapeutic integration and eclecticism (Norcross, 2003). Historically the terms 'integration' and 'eclectic' have been used interchangeably by practitioners (see Hollanders, 2000). However, when distinctions are made, those that emphasise technical skills are often classified as 'eclectic' and those more theoretically minded as 'integrative' (Hollanders, 2003). Here it is worth noting that this paper reflects upon students' experiences of attending integrative courses based upon the Skilled Helper framework as devised by Gerard Egan (e.g. Egan, 1975; 2009). This approach provides both a theoretical framework to conceptualise

therapy and emphasises the development of particular skills. It therefore straddles a middle ground between integration and eclecticism, and the term 'integration' is utilised pragmatically from this point on to reflect these sentiments.

When surveying the theoretical orientations of counsellors and psychotherapists, Hollanders (1997) found that integrative approaches were most likely to be implemented by experienced practitioners. Furthermore, eminent writers who have traced their journeys in becoming an integrative therapist have commonly started from knowing either one or two models well, thus beginning to integrate post-graduation (e.g. Castonguay, 2006; Garfield, 2000; Norcross, 2006). However, in contrast to such reports, counsellor training is increasingly offered in integrative models as a starting point in counsellors' careers. Presently we know little

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about the experiences and developmental processes of trainees on such programmes, and it is on the views expressed by this group that this paper concentrates.

#### *Research on integrative training*

Counsellor and psychotherapy training has attracted little attention to date (Fauth et al., 2007), and literature written on integrative training tends to focus upon idealised training programmes (e.g. Castonguay, 2000; Norcross & Beutler, 2000). Additionally, the impact of training upon the quality of therapy eventually offered by counsellors is notoriously difficult to investigate due to the diversity of influences on each individual. Such issues are reported to create difficult methodological challenges for researchers (see Rønnestad & Ladany, 2006), and although a handful of North American studies do exist investigating integrative training, they have generally produced inconsistent findings (Beutler et al., 2004).

Gawe (2004) and Beitman and Yue (1999a, 1999b) suggest integrative training may provide advantages over traditional forms of training. Gawe (2004) compared two sets of trainees, 20 years apart, training in integrative therapy. Therapy outcomes of students trained from a pure model of therapy were compared with outcomes of these two groups, and the results showed a relative advantage favouring the integrative training model. The Beitman and Yue (1999a, 1999b) papers report on a programme of psychotherapy training designed to introduce trainees to common psychotherapeutic concepts. These authors include a comparison with residents trained at another university that did not offer a similar intervention. In both of these instances, positive effects are at least in part attributed to the integrative training. However, methodological difficulties such as those referred to above, hamper the possibility of drawing any firm conclusions with this data.

#### *Current thought on integration and training*

There are those who question whether integration is possible (Wheeler, 1993). Additionally, even if it is viewed as possible, some believe that it would be too complex to teach and even more difficult for trainees to grasp (Lecompte et al., 1993). Others are more open to such a process but approach it with caution. For instance, a number of authors advocate the use of an assimilative approach to learning integration;

a view in which a therapist would learn one or two systems of psychotherapy first of all before expanding upon this (Gold, 2005). Embedded within this assimilative thinking, it is suggested the earlier a student is expected to learn and practise an integrative perspective of psychotherapy as a core model, the more conflict is aroused for the learner in areas of 'heroic identification, brand loyalty and tribal affiliation' (Gold, 2005, p. 377). In particular, Gold believes that by training in integrative stances, students are denied the opportunity to form an identification with one school of thought and this therefore provokes anxiety and conflict. He adds, 'Freedom, early in one's career, seems to be accompanied by the anxiety of too much to lose, by too much "thrown" alienation, and often by a search for the brand or tribe with whom one can blend in and identify' (p. 380).

In contrast to the more cautionary voices, there are those who philosophically support such pluralist thinking in counsellor training (e.g. McLeod & Cooper, 2007). Some suggest that delaying the exposure until after learning one or two systems separately, makes it harder for students to be open and flexible to new ideas (e.g. Norcross & Halgin, 2005). Many authors (e.g. Hollanders, 1999; Scaturro, 2005) therefore advocate the use of trans-theoretical models such as those developed by Egan (2006), Prochaska and DiClemente (1992) and Lazarus (1981) as a foundation for training. Yet despite this type of thinking, it must also be noted that even those in support of introducing integration early in psychotherapists' careers admit that students on integrative courses 'felt they were learning basic theories in their pure form while learning how to integrate them at the same time' (Consoli & Jester, 2005, p. 369). Norcross (interviewed by Dryden [1991]) recognises this could be a perceived disadvantage of eclectic/integrative training programmes, stating trainees complain that there is 'just too much to know' and that 'you can't do it all during the available time' (p. 78).

#### *Managing theoretical tension*

Ladany et al. (2008) have suggested tolerating ambiguity is an important aspect of any effective counselling practice. Such a notion seems to be particularly pertinent for integrative counsellor training. Consoli and Jester's (2005, p. 359) description of good predictors of successful therapists include 'tolerance of ambiguity, diversity, and alternative points of

views'. By rejecting a single conceptual framework as a guide, integrative therapists face increased ambiguity in their counselling practice (Halgin, 1985); the ability to cope and manage this uncertainty is acknowledged as an essential task for trainees in integrative psychotherapy (Allen et al., 2000; Norcross, 1988).

It is suggested that the ability to hold disparate approaches, referred to as 'integration as dynamic tension', is generally possible by mature therapists rather than the novice (O'Hara & Schofield, 2008). Early career therapists' tendencies to need early closure or resolution of conflict (Jenning et al., 2003; Orlinsky & Rønnestad, 2005; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003) mean they are unable to value the complexities and ambiguities of tensions between models (O'Hara & Schofield, 2008). Yet, essentially, this is the task set out for the novice counsellor embarking on integrative training.

#### *Clarifying the rational: A personal interest*

As is evident in the literature, there is an anecdotal acknowledgement of the difficulty, anxiety and uncertainty that students face when trying to integrate counselling theories. However, no mention is made of how students on these courses actually work through this potentially unsettling process. Such an omission has a very personal edge to it for both authors. First, the primary author (LL) has herself recently completed such a training and encountered the challenges of students first hand. Secondly, the supporting author (TH) is a graduate of such a course and an existing trainer in integrative practice. Thus, in accounting for the gap in existing literature and personal interest in the subject matter, the study explores newly qualified counsellors' reflections of undertaking professional training in integrative counselling. More specifically, the following research question was posed:

How do counsellors make sense of therapeutic integration following the completion of their profession qualification?

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Seven counsellors participated in total: four were female and all were white and aged between 36 and 52 years. All but one of the participants had successfully completed a professional training (diploma or above) in integrative counselling within the last

12 months. One participant had a further five hours of counselling practice to complete before satisfying the requirements of their course. Each individual had attended a course that was based upon Gerard Egan's 'Skilled Helper Model' (see Egan [2009] for the most up to date revision of this model) and all the participants were currently practising as counsellors.

### *Focus groups*

The study explored participants' experiences through two focus groups. Each of these met once and lasted one and a half hours. The first group consisted of three people and the second group of four (not including the facilitator). On completion of the groups, the meetings were transcribed and analysed.

As literature points to the ambiguities that students may feel in learning an integrative model, it was felt that focus groups would provide an opportunity to creatively explore such a topic. It was reasoned that participants would feel more comfortable in a setting with their peers discussing these issues and might gain reassurance when realising that feelings, behaviours and uncertainties are shared by others in their group (Duncombe & Marsden, 1996; Farquhar & Das, 1999; Madriz, 1998; Stewart & Shamdasami, 1990).

Since the aim of the focus group is not necessarily to obtain the group's answers, but rather to stimulate discussions and thereby understand the means and norms which underlie those group answers (Bloor et al., 2001), topics were offered for the group to discuss. These topics were:

- the experiences of learning integrative counselling;
- the participants' sense of integration of theory and skills;
- the experiences post-qualification;
- the participant's experience of supervision.

These areas were purposefully broad and offered to each group in the form of open questions so that conversations were not pre-empted. Additionally, a number of quotes were also printed out as handouts taken from the literature around learning an integrative model. These were used as a fall back if discussion was not stimulated by other means.

### *Analysis*

The transcripts from the focus groups were coded using Rennie, Phillips and Quartaro's (1988)

method of categorising progressively from meaning unit to meaning unit when proceeding through a text. Here, the analyst is attentive to the main point or theme of a given passage. This was viewed as more appropriate than the more traditional line-by-line open coding process (see Corbin & Strauss, 2008) as it helped to retain the key sentiments of the participants' words; a factor that is often viewed as a pitfall of grounded theory analysis (e.g. Rennie & Fergus, 2006; West, 2001).

Each meaning unit was studied carefully before being assigned a category. When new meanings are encountered, categories to represent them are added to the list. These meaning units were then assigned to 'higher order' categories that included many of the meaning units. The connection between these categories was compared and contrasted through the technique of 'axial coding' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Finally, a member check of the data was carried out with the final conceptualisation of the data. Participants were asked to provide any reactions or responses to the analysis. Such a process is acknowledged as an important credibility check for qualitative research (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999).

#### *Ethical considerations*

This study attended to the BACP's *Ethical framework* (BACP, 2007) and the same organisation's guidelines for researching counselling and psychotherapy (Bond, 2004) and was granted university ethical approval. Participants were informed of the aims of the research, how the information was to be held, and their right to withdraw during the data collection or at any point after. Additionally, they were informed that whilst all names had been changed in the transcription of the focus groups, it was possible that they may be identified due to the small pool of individuals used to source participants.

#### **Findings**

The core category was 'The challenge of becoming an integrative counsellor', with four subsequent categories: (1) 'training issues', (2) 'applied issues', (3) 'the development of an integrative theory and identity', and (4) 'the impact of integrative training post qualification' (see Table I).

Table I. An overview of the categories and meaning units (MU) elicited from the data.

Core category. The challenge of becoming an integrative counsellor: Navigating murky waters	
	MU
1. Training issues: Struggling to make sense of integrative theory	45
Depth and breadth of knowledge	9
Early significance of integration:	3
■ Struggling to make use of theory	
The Skilled Helper as a course structure:	22
■ Struggle and accessibility	
■ Personal preference and Egan (or not)	
Guidance in integration:	11
■ Ambiguity and Responsibility	
2. Applied issues: Managing the multitude of influences	70
(i) Practice issues	(54)
Influences on integration:	30
■ Practice context	
■ Reading	
■ Client-led/collaborative	
Flexibility/fluidity	
Accountability	18
■ ambiguity and risk	6
(ii) Supervision: A mixed experience	(16)
Constructive experiences:	8
■ Reducing anxiety, identification	
■ New perspectives on practice	
Disappointing experience	3
Restrictions of one model supervision	5
3. The development of an integrative theory and identity:	93
From manualised to personalised approaches	
Having a home base	8
Restraints of home base	9
Guilt in leaving a home base	12
Acquiring and discarding theories	3
Uniqueness	9
Open-mindedness	12
Defining eclectic and integration:	11
■ Ambiguity and anxiety	
Attempting to make sense of integration:	20
■ Ambiguity and struggle	
Too much to know	5
Value of reflecting on the integrative process	4
4. The impact of integrative training post qualification:	23
Embracing a nomadic journey.	
Changes since qualification:	11
■ Tolerating ambiguity	
■ Confidence	
■ Optimism	
Theoretical consolidation	4
Integration as a work in progress	8

*The challenge of becoming an integrative counsellor:  
Navigating murky waters*

At the heart of this study, participants reported the impact of not having one clear and solid theoretical framework to guide the way through their therapeutic training. Specifically, it was noted that the absence of a shared discourse, such as those that surround established pure models, made it difficult to communicate and share approaches. Commonly integrative theory was experienced as ambiguous in nature, and this ambiguity raised numerous anxieties within those who took part in the focus group. The participants' experiences could therefore be viewed as akin to wading through murky waters in which they were not quite sure about the direction they were supposed to head. For those involved in this study, this proved a difficult process and individuals reported struggling to become and remain integrative practitioners when faced with such ambiguity.

The struggle noted above resonated throughout participants' therapeutic training (training issues), practice and supervision (applied issues), and personal development activities (the development of an integrative theory and identity). Furthermore, the developmental aspect to the counsellors' training manifested itself in the way that the participants made sense of their training post-qualification (the impact of integration post-qualification).

*Training issues: Struggling to make sense of integrative theory*

The participants felt that the courses they attended provided a brief and limited overview of psychotherapeutic models. They did not cover theory in great depth and there was an expectation to follow up models of interest further – some individuals felt they were given an 'empty container' that they needed to fill up in their own time. Furthermore, often integration was not a main concern of the participants in the initial stages of training. Integrative models were experienced as difficult to access and sometimes lacking the charismatic lure of some pure paradigm models. One participant noted of the Skilled Helper Model:

Joe: . . . someone like me who hadn't done Egan at all, I think it really blocked me in being able to absorb any of his stuff because I just thought, this is like chewing dry crackers. I've got halfway through the packet and now I can't swallow (Eve-laugh).

The struggle to make sense of integrative theory went deep into the training experience. Participants differed in their views on where the responsibility of guiding integration rested. For some, courses lacked the conjunctions between different models, and participants sought more guidance on how to fit models together. For others, as is noted in the following quote, the responsibility to find ways to integrate was interpreted as a personal one:

Kay: I think I, I remember the course slightly differently in that, um, I remember quite a lot of emphasis on you know this is up to you now to knit these together.

The ambiguous nature of the theory and the expectations of the participants therefore meant the experience of making sense of their training was often a struggle. In the next section we begin to unpack how this begun to manifest in practice.

*Applied issues: Managing the multitude of influences*

We have separated this category into two parts, 'practice issues' and 'supervision'. The former reflects the experiences of transplanting integrative theory into client work, while the latter focuses upon the experiences and expectations of attending supervision in these early career stages.

*Practice issues*

Discussions about how an integrative approach was adopted in practice focused on the needs of the client, the context of counselling placements, and counsellor's reading around the subject. Predominantly this client-led approach was framed as collaborative, personal and tailored. There was a sense this led to a more equal relationship and devolving of power. In contrast, a consequence of such fluidity was the sense of risk-taking, since participants might find it difficult to account for their actions. This is exemplified in the following quote:

Emily: It's taking a risk, it's not quite knowing fully how to do something but just tentatively doing it.

Here it becomes evident that the flexibility of the integrative approaches adopted by the participants in this study proves rather double edged. On the one hand it is viewed as appropriately flexible for psychological interventions, whilst on the other it

can feel like a risky process with no one-size-fits-all formula.

### *Supervision*

Participants had mixed experiences of supervision in relation to their integrative practice. Some found supervision to be constructive and that it had facilitated integration by enabling participants to consider different theoretical perspectives. One participant noted how a supervisor reduced anxiety by identifying with the supervisee's experience:

Kay: She said something like 'Oh I don't know what I am, I just use whatever fits.' And I think maybe that was quite helpful because it showed me you don't have to be too precious about it really.

In contrast to the positive experiences, for others supervision had not provided the support required or lived up to their perceived expectations. The participants reported supervisors having limited experience of integrative models of therapy. They were also disappointed about the lack of support and guidance they received when attempting to make sense of integrative theory:

Elizabeth: well at the outset no they weren't. They were both in pure models... and that was a bit of a challenge for me because they didn't help me at all to get a hold on anything integrative.

### *The development of an integrative theory and identity: From manualised to personalised approaches*

Participants reported warming to a specific therapeutic model. This formed a 'home base', which they felt they could return to when struggling with their client work. However, home bases also acted as restraints. For some, as is indicated in the quote below, moving beyond the parameters of a specific model was associated with the guilt of not following a theory entirely:

Elizabeth: That then allows me to bring in things that I wouldn't dare do in the earlier days and I would have felt that I had sinned against the model.

This also led to questions around the preference for different approaches. While some theories were noted, others were discarded because of a

disharmony with personal philosophies. The perceived power of the theories dissolve as the locus of integration seems to shift from an external, manualised source, to an internal, personalised evaluation of theories.

Kay: But then what I'll end up with at the end will be mine (group-um). It will be my way of working. Unique.

One area of contention that became evident was the struggle to differentiate between therapeutic integration and eclecticism. Participants often looked and found confirmation in each other of what constituted integration.

The abundance of theories that students are introduced to can create confusion and making sense of them can prove difficult. Interestingly, a bi-product of the focus groups was that those who attended also found it to be a useful reflective space.

Joe: it's not a conversation I've had since the course finished back in June last year. And I guess in some respects I haven't sat down and thought about it particularly.

In the above quote Joe highlights the scarcity of opportunity to reflect upon how his theoretical training manifested in practice with clients.

### *The impact of integrative training post qualification: Embracing a nomadic journey*

Participants talked about the changes that had taken place in their perceptions of theory, practice and personal development since they had qualified. A number of individuals reported the ongoing nature of their therapeutic training. They did not feel they had reached the end of their integrative journey and they were still very much immersed within this process. Importantly, at this stage, there was a sense of optimism about their future integrative development.

Mark: But it's quite freeing once you've qualified... that you can basically be a bit more freer without being irresponsible.

Thus, there was a sense that following qualification participants were learning to tolerate the anxiety, ambiguity and tension between models. They had begun to consolidate much of the theory they had been introduced to and their confidence as integrative practitioners had increased. With this in mind, it

seemed that participants were starting to reap the rewards of their struggles and risk-taking experienced during their training.

Adam: I quite like not being ... being a bit of a Nomad and going between tribes.

The nomadic existence was therefore embraced by many in the group and ultimately viewed as a strength of being on an integrative programme. Additionally, it was a process that was felt to be flexible enough to amalgamate future training experiences. The sentiment that therapeutic training was a work in progress, proved a major element of both group's experiences.

### Discussion

The participants' experiences suggest learning to be an integrative counsellor is an ambiguous and anxious process. Individuals described navigating their way through their training without a clear theoretical guide and encountering numerous hurdles. In particular they struggled to find a pathway between the firm ground, inherent in purist models, and maintain the autonomy and flexibility of integration. As this process becomes more familiar, some described their confidence steadily increasing as they continue their integrative journeys post qualification.

#### *Becoming an integrative practitioner*

Participants' experiences of managing ambiguity and uncertainty support much of the literature available on learning integration (e.g. Allen et al., 2000; Halgin, 1985; Ladany et al., 2008; Norcross, 1988). What seemed particularly important to those involved was how these different theories linked together and how they attained guidance on integrating theory. These conjunctions between models are identified as a possible means of managing uncertainty and ambiguity. Yet the trans-theoretical models, which could act as a framework for integration and are currently much favoured as the foundation of integrative courses (Boswell & Castonguay, 2007; Hollanders, 1999; Scaturro, 2005), are not necessarily utilised as a framework on which to base integration. Rather, students might seek to build their own theoretical framework. Participants' reluctance to use these particular trans-theoretical models, alongside their limited awareness of, or passion

for the model as a theoretical base for their courses, suggested that the way these models are introduced might affect how accessible they are to trainees.

Most of the participants, during their initial training years, could be viewed as making a natural move towards assimilative integration. This is often suggested as a starting point to learn integration (Gold, 2005; Greben, 2004). Integration often began when participants felt ready to risk leaving the comfort and structure of pure paradigms and when they felt restrained by what they could offer. Therefore, they seemed to describe an organic, developmental component to integration. Such a process appears less neat or linear than proposed training programmes, where trainees move through previously identified stages (e.g. Castonguay & Boswell, 2007). Thus, for the individuals in this study, an important component of learning and development happened as a consequence of the restrictions and tensions in their practice.

Participants' described experiences of isolation and alienation from 'tribes' of thought (Gold, 2005). However, through the process of resisting total identification with one brand or tribe, participants learn to become open and flexible, a skill that is required of the integrative trainee (e.g. Norcross & Halgin, 2005). They appear to have acquired a broader identity, transcending the idea of tribal loyalties. The resistance to identify with one school of thought, which Gold views as problematic, is later the foundation for much of the integrative identity – for instance the ability to tolerate ambiguity and remain open-minded. Therefore, seeking to identify with a community might be usefully conceptualised as a developmental learning stage in early training that is necessary to move beyond.

Training in integrative approaches from the outset may have equipped participants with skills normally associated with more mature therapists. The literature suggests trainees and novices are unequipped to deal with tensions and ambiguities until later in their counselling and psychotherapy careers (Jenning et al., 2003; Orlinsky & Rønnestad, 2005; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). However, learning integration as an initial model appears to have the potential to prepare trainees earlier for this. Additionally, conflict and tension is cited as difficult to manage throughout the process of learning.

The participants here generally spoke of developing an ability to manage this tension and conflict between theories once they had explored such issues in their work with clients. Therefore, these



individuals display tendencies more commonly associated with mature therapists – for instance, managing tensions and ambiguity, and acquiring and discarding theories to suit their personal preferences (Jenning et al., 2003; O’Hara & Schofield, 2008). Additionally, training as an integrative therapist led participants to practice in a more client-led and collaborative manner.

Integration was often viewed as an unclear and difficult to define process. This inability to definitively describe therapeutic practice can be celebrated as a mastery of ambiguity early in one’s career. Of more concern, it can also have implications for participants’ ability to account for their practice. Such an issue highlights the need for an integrative framework to be identified or developed that is both theoretically sound and attractive to students. Interestingly none of the participants seemed to be aware of pluralism as an established theoretical approach (e.g. Cooper & McLeod, 2007), despite descriptions of their practice often resembling this stance.

Finally, participants valued diversity and difference in therapeutic approaches at the level of practice, but on a theoretical level, the isolation that can come with being an integrative counsellor can be problematic; in particular perceived theoretical consensus to grant certain privileges such as belonging, support and accountability. The lack of a well-established integrative ‘tribe’ (Gold, 2005) may therefore mean that integrative practitioners get overlooked for those more affiliated to a pure paradigm.

### *Recommendations*

Three major recommendations can be highlighted from this study.

*Trainees.* It was evident during this project that reflecting on integration proved beneficial to participants. In light of this, and on reflecting upon the isolation outlined in the data, peer support groups for students on such courses may be established to develop a community of like-minded practitioners.

*Supervisors.* Finding an appropriate supervisor proved difficult for some participants. Supervisors should be open and able to provide guidance on integration. Such input would help to manage ambiguity as well as lessen feelings of isolation, a factor particularly pertinent to trainees at the early stages of their career.

*Curriculum developers and trainers.* Introducing integrative theory early on in courses proved problematic for some trainees. Curriculum developers and trainers may consider focusing upon developing counselling skills and introducing pure models before introducing these models. Alternatively, integrative models could be revisited at intervals throughout courses to reflect upon trainees’ understanding of them. Trainers might bear this in mind and highlight to trainees the ambiguous and anxiety-provoking nature of learning to be an integrative therapist.

### *Limitations and future areas of research*

The research is based on a small sample size of participants. The participants involved in this work had all attended courses using the Skilled Helper model (Egan, 2009) as an integrative framework. However, as there are a multitude of models of integration, and the personality of the trainers themselves will differ from institution to institution, different findings may be reached in different settings.

Research on integration is in its infancy (Castonguay, 2005), and knowledge of how integrative trainees develop would clearly be useful for training programmes and supervision. Participants described an unclear and mixed picture of the role and significance of supervision for the integrative trainee and beyond. Literature on supervision for integrative trainees is also hazy, despite the fact it is acknowledged as an important aspect of learning. Precisely what would constitute useful supervision for the integrative trainee and novice would help to inform supervisory practice and theory.

### **Conclusion**

Participants made sense of integration by tolerating theoretical ambiguity and anxiety in order to provide a pluralistic, client-led approach. Having ‘tried on’ different approaches to see if they fitted their personal preferences, participants retained some, while returning others. Participants appear to have chosen to make sense of integrative theory by building their own unique integrative approaches, rather than directly adopting frameworks provided in training. Such a process proved both challenging and rewarding and the ability to be open-minded and flexible proved fundamental throughout this ongoing process. The findings from this work will hopefully help inform training programmes and provide

insight into our understanding of the integrative practitioners' development.

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