

Up Against It

Nancy Mroczek PhD

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The National Psychologist featured an article written by former APA president Dr Nicholas Cummings in the Sept/Oct 2018 (available in print only, n/a online as yet) that clinical psychology is at its end. With a different take, I too have been thinking for quite a long time that psychology is embarrassed by a weak-looking and barely commonly understood or cherished value.

Clinical or otherwise, what makes a great psychologist? Someone who knows a lot about a lot, ie, an intellectually minded soul with a down-to-earth sensibility and, of course, non-judgmental compassion. One must be learned and worldly but not whatsoever effete. For the record, if these qualities exist, cultural bias/ misunderstanding becomes more of a moot question.

I believe that to prove one's mettle, one must have experience and learning in a lot of matters, and, especially a lot of kinds of "knowledges" that are within the rubric of psychology itself. Such knowledges are fundamental and distinct from a psychology specific to pathological, uneasy, or despairing states of being.

Psychology has promoted itself as a clinical enterprise. What does it mean to say 'professional' psychology? Is non-clinical psychology non professional. And what about the qualifier 'licensed' psychologist - to indicate 'real', sanctioned. Do MD's list as licensed?

Generally speaking, are there distinctive results coming from clinical psychology - i.e, 'where's the beef'? A psychologist often can be seen as someone to talk to as one may talk with a parent, neighbor, friend, master's level clinician, certified therapist, counselor, minister, etc.

Psychology came into being with great thinkers. A clinical psychologist has to think not only clinically but also psychologically from within the whole panoply of what psychology has to offer. He/she should be rigorously and broadly and academically educated within the field. Such background is both implicitly and explicitly useful in clinical practice.

I feel one of the events that spurred psychology's demise is/was the establishment of professional schools - now as though this is what psychology stands for. HMO's coming into being did not help the situation as they did not want to pay for indeterminate sessions providing qualitative experience that neither is countable nor fitted to a circumscribed result. Insurers thus increase pressure to have so-called measurable results under short time allowances in dictating what should be paid for.

Psychologists, and others, have had to go back to the drawing board time and again with increasingly fewer degrees of freedom on how to 'provide' clinical work. Clinical psychologists de facto mostly work for insurers and insurers are in the driver's seat. So-called 'providers'

constantly must adapt to what insurers demand they do, including, in the case of Medicare, homework!. If you feel you would like to help people, you are actually signing up for red tape.

Gone are the times when a person can meander through the conscious and subconscious to get a better grip on life and self or to get more meaningfully acquainted with his/her inner/outer world. This IS what psychology in practice should be about but it is not. Not only, the behavioral approach has been bastardized greatly while myriad and subtle nuances of behavior are neither appreciated nor in the mix. The behavioral approach has also been used non-clinically in cheesy manipulations that are neither informing nor consented to nor having to do with altruism.

Some of the so-called "evidence based" standardized methods are simplistic and boring. Also, the quality of methods or the very questions asked to determine "methods" leave a lot to be desired. While there is so much emphasis on using what is sanctioned as "evidence based" -, in a sense, almost anyone can do a standardized routine. Is someone less educated and less costly less suitable. Cookie cutter practice - tripe - is good for automatons in an age of digitalism and not much can be expected in heft.

True clinical psychology is a great art - a great art developed on a foundation of scholarliness and worldliness with each practitioner having a unique role to play. Psychology has fritted away its own profundity. Is it ethical to lure newcomers to high debt for a career in psychology? In theory, newcomers could throw off the shackles and become more rigorously academic and profound, but that is theory.

Psychology over played the clinical aspect to the detriment of psychology as a broad science. By science I do not mean statistics or experimental method, - I mean rigor of wide ranging mentation. To me, it is not experimental and other branches of psychology that spoiled things for clinical, but exactly the opposite. In the public and just about everyone's mind, psychology is clinical and the clinical is a vague, usually remote, idea. It is often confused with other disciplines, most notably psychiatry - but others as well.

Commonly, clinical psychology may be seen as a lesser profession as a matter of non drug prescription. Nevertheless psychology non-prescribers must participate with drug prescription per standard of care. That in turn has impinged on the clinical psychology domain of verbal interchange. Rare is/was a case by psychology being taken to the public on the bona fide value of a better knowing of oneself or of expanding or fleshing out the experience of the phenomenology of being alive.

As I've written on other occasions, calling clinical psychology therapy or a psychologist a therapist does not do it any favors. When you add the hoops a psychologist must jump through, the huge attendant liabilities to practice, and the ho-hum salary which at times must even be fought for, the prospect becomes almost a farce. Against this backdrop, the arduousness and cost of a specialty board certification is a head shaker as are pretty much most dues and fees.

Finally, how can the drum not be beaten on the long standing and shameful increasing skew to activism with political and/or sociocultural positioning serving as material of psychology.

Psychology, ALL psychology, including philosophic bases and psychiatric currents (excepting the (ab)use of animals for any research from now and into the future) is beautiful. The 50's, 60's, 70's were 'jammin'. Now the window to encountering glorious psyche is closed. Maybe psychology will rise again - another time, another place.