

Issues in

# Radical Therapy

**SPECIAL ISSUE ON HEALING:**

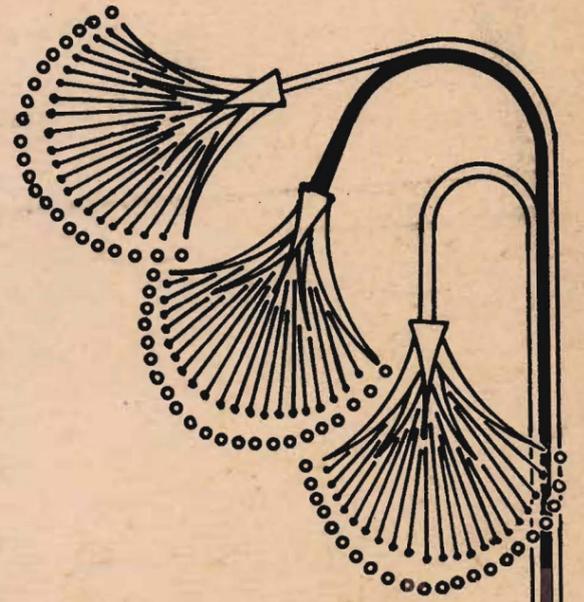
**LOVING MY BODY**

**T'AI CHI & ME**

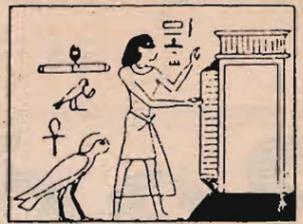
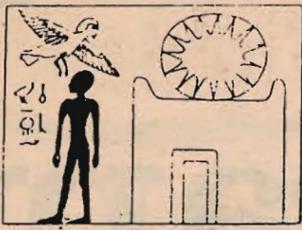
**CANCER SELF-HELP**

**CO-COUNSELING**

**COOPERATIVE HEALING**



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Special thank you to Anodea Judith for art work *Stephen Vaughn, too!*

EDITORS: Jude La Barre and Darca Nicholson



## APOLOGIES!

"Monster" (IRT #20) was written by Dan Kelleher, not Marianne Sears as was credited. We apologize to both of them!

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## Manuscript Guidelines

Your articles are always welcome. We want to see your work and hear about what you're doing. *Please* observe the following guidelines:

1. All manuscripts need to be typed and double spaced with name and address appearing on the title page. Type your last name in the upper left corner of each additional numbered page.
2. Send us three copies. Keep the original as we do not return manuscripts.
3. State whether or not we have permission to revise and/or edit your work.
4. Include a short paragraph describing yourself and what you do.
5. Optimum manuscripts length is ten pages or less.

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# CO-COUNSELING &

# PROBLEM SOLVING

Gail Pheterson

The Dutch Feminist Exercise Groups in Radical Therapy (FORT) form an energized growing community of autonomous and collectively in-touch women's therapy groups. One of the things I want to share about this community is the effective combination of technique and theory from both Radical Therapy (RT) and Re-evaluation Counseling (RC). I want to describe the groups in which these two modalities form one personal-political process and also, to describe the community development of such a movement here in Holland. To do all of that I need to tell about myself and about my experience in a culture other than my own.

I have been training groups to use a combination of Re-evaluation Counseling and Radical Therapy for the past five years. This combination makes sense to me, and I believe also to many others, as a feminist process of healing and politically aware problem solving. During the summer of 1975, Lillian Moed and I led a series of intensive training workshops in Holland on "Feminist Therapy." Our sort of feminist therapy was basically Radical Therapy and Re-evaluation Counseling. Those workshops have evolved into a large grassroots Dutch women's therapy movement, called FORT, Feminist Exercise Groups in Radical Therapy. Groups usually begin in week-long workshops with two facilitators whose function it is to transfer their skill to all group members as soon as possible (this varies from a week to a year). Eventually, the group rotates leadership. Meetings focus on solving problems, discharging distress (i.e., healing), supporting each other in political struggles, and learning to facilitate new groups. Often the members of autonomous groups continue to get additional training in the Co-counseling community or in other training workshops.

I have been very busy with this process here in Holland these last two years. My own training came through the Re-evaluation Counseling (RC or Co-counseling) community in America and through a Radical Therapy collective in Riverside, California. As a Co-counseling teacher, I was not totally satisfied with the political assumptions and strategies of the Co-counseling theory and community organization. As a radical therapist, I was not totally satisfied with the process of healing internalized oppression (called in Co-counseling "old pain" or "distress pattern"). From the beginning of

my exposure to these two movements, I found myself combining them. They are both appealing in their political context, their collective organization, and their tangible, self-validating effectiveness as personal-political change agents.

I believe that others in America are also using the combination of RT and RC and I think it may be useful to explicate how the group process and community organization can function. I will not elaborate the theories behind RT or RC. Readers of this journal will be familiar with sources of RT theory and I will suggest some literature on RC.<sup>1</sup> I see elements of Co-counseling in some articles in IRT (especially

those by Sara Winter) without specific reference to Co-counseling. I know that the International Co-counseling Community has as a basic guideline the "non-contamination" of pure Re-evaluation Counseling. Other approaches are not to be mixed with RC or, if they are, RC should not be called by name. I usually don't call my workshops Co-counseling and I imagine many others use RC in a variety of ways without calling it by name. This is often desirable; skills are taught in ordinary language and in a wide range of situations. However, it may mystify the source and context of a set of techniques which derive from a specific theoretical

base and extend to an increasingly large worldwide population. Skills never develop in a vacuum; the reason and process behind them is relevant information for all those who use them.

I always begin training with the Co-counseling theory because it teaches the basic goodness, smartness, and loveliness of human beings (also in Radical Therapy) and it explains the spontaneous release of painful emotions through crying, shaking, raging, laughing, yawning, etc. I find that permission and skills to express these emotions sets a safe and open tone for all that follows. Furthermore, the Co-counseling primary technique for facilitating such discharge is validation, appreciation of self and others, which gives immediate permission for people to get the strokes and accompanying emotional release they need. Also, the Co-counseling process is in itself energizing, playful, and cozy; the style is for me feminist in its integration of work and play, thinking and feeling, crying and laughing, cuddling and raging.

Once we are safe and inspired as a group, we are ready to use Radical Therapy theory and skills. Being direct with one's needs and perceptions is scary. It helps to know how to release painful emotion along the way and how to heal distress playfully without the culturally ingrained seriousness which usually loads communication. If there are no easily available and acceptable outlets for hurt feelings then it is difficult to avoid their squirting out in unstraight messages.

Radical Therapy provides an excellent structure, both concretely and theoretically, for working together on our personal-political struggles. Co-counseling provides an always available process for releasing emotional pain and distinguishing what is present time oppression from what is internalized oppression. Perhaps a possible evening agenda can best illustrate how these processes work together:

8:00 News and Goods

This is a Co-counseling opening technique which gives everyone an opportunity to focus on and brag about what's going well for them. It works to bring everyone's attention together, to allow an early sharing of the week's happenings, to shake off tensions in giggles or shivers, and to avoid colluding in slumps of "ain't the winter awful."



8:15 Paranoid fantasies, stamps, strokes

8:30 Agenda making

8:40 Mini session

People sit close, in pairs of two, holding hands. They take equal time, in this case ten minutes each, to work on whatever they need such as little or big upsets during the week, self-appreciation, or deciding how to work that evening.

9:00 Problem solving

9:40 Stretch, mini yoga exercise, meditation, or mini message

9:45 Direction holding

This is an RC process in which each person uses a few minutes to find and hold a direction against their chronic pattern (i.e., script). A direction is a short sentence with appropriate posture, facial expression, and tone which interrupts and contradicts one's script. Repeating the same direction facilitates the release of painful emotion and thereby loosens the stronghold of the script. An example of a direction might be: "I am a powerful woman" said in strong voice with upright posture and a look of confidence.

This exercise is similar to "offing the pig" except for its specific and direct strategy to release painful emotion.

10:15 Paranoid fantasies, stamps, strokes

10:30 A circle hug with affection, sharing, often singing

On other evenings, a topic such as power, class, sex or work might be the theme for news and goods, mini sessions, problem solving, and direction holding. Some evenings may be devoted entirely to problem solving or to working on releasing emotions such as anger. During each week (once a group has decided they are ready to work without outside facilitation), a different two women meet to discuss the group and to plan a tentative, always flexible, program for the next meeting. They act as facilitators by keeping an overview of the group, by taking special initiative with those who are working, and by keeping time or asking someone else to do so.

I have also used a combination of RT and RC in mediations. For example, here is the schedule of a mediation between two women in love and in conflict:

8:00 Each person tells of a pleasant memory with the other. This frees attention for the present time and reminds each person why she is working on the relationship.

8:10 Each tells what she hopes will come out of the mediation.

8:20 Paranoid fantasies, stamps.

8:50 Each person takes ten minutes to discharge painful emotions. The mediator acts as counselor with the other woman being quietly, fully present.

It is possible here for each person to say anything



whether it makes sense or not, whether one means it as a direct communicative message or not, whether it relates to the other person or to some totally unrelated past or present relationship. There is a clear understanding that this is an expression of pain, not necessarily "reasonable" but necessarily expressed in order to think clearly about the present situation.

9:10 Each person says 100 percent of what she wants in the relationship.

Contradictions in needs and desires are exposed and considered, and a mutually agreed upon contract is made.

9:25 Strokes

9:30 A session for the mediator  
The two women who have been working on their relationship give their attention to the mediator for a session in which she can work on anything, including re-

stimulations from the mediation (i.e., things in her own experience that the mediation reminded her of) or how she felt doing the mediation or something totally unrelated such as frustrations with her writing. Instead the mediator may want a body message or to be entertained. Whether such an immediate reciprocity occurs has depended for me upon prior agreement, my relationship with the women, and their relationship with each other.

10:15 Evaluative feedback on the evening as a whole, affection sharing, hugs . . .

At long workshops, full days are devoted to Co-counseling, including two-way sessions, small group direction holding, teaching by more experienced co-counselors of skills such as how to work on physical ailments or how to work on our accommodation of oppression and privilege. During these "Co-

counseling" days (the quotation marks are to note that the name Co-counseling is, strictly speaking, a misnomer as long as it is mingled with other therapeutic or political processes), direct feedback, paranoid fantasies, stamps, and strokes are ongoing although usually not a part of the day's agenda. Also, people may refer to their parent, adult, or child as a convenient way to understand their feelings and thoughts. Whole days are also devoted to Radical Therapy problem-solving. During these days, discharge of painful emotion is facilitated when the person working asks for that kind of support; light, present time techniques are also used when they seem appropriate.

Both RT and RC rest on a personal-political analysis. The difference between them is one of focus. I present Co-counseling theory as a political analysis of pain, a collective strategy for human liberation, and an individual healing process. The RC community acknowledges that the political system needs to be changed but it insists that posi-

tive, aware change depends upon the discharge of accumulated distress. This distress sabotages our ability to think and thereby our political potency. Radical Therapy, according to my understanding, rests on the assumption that moving against pain is necessarily a collective process of moving against oppression. Because isolation and mystification define oppression, liberation must come through contact with a group consciousness. So, whereas RC heals from the inside person to the outside world, RT liberates from the outside world to the inside person. I believe in the usefulness of both theories and find them not only compatible but mutually in need of one another. Re-evaluation Counseling facilitates the healing of one's unique pain within its socially oppressive context by creating total safety in a singularly loving setting. Radical Therapy facilitates liberation from that context by changing its alienating conditions into conditions of true contact. Radical therapists might disagree with the premise that we have "unique pain" but I think it is important not to discount the different ways in which we have been affected by our similarly dehumanizing society. I think that a good RT group, one not only politically aware but also emotionally aware, knows at least intuitively the RC skills. I think a good RC group, one not only emotionally aware but also politically aware, is immediately responsive to RT skills. I see RC becoming more political and RT becoming broader in its therapeutic approaches. Nonetheless, I still miss RC when I

work with radical therapists and I miss RT when I work with co-counselors. I find groups most powerful when they know both.

Women in the FORT community are hard working, spirited, and groping with issues such as money, power, professionalism, structure, and the links, if indeed they exist, between Radical Therapy and revolution. The women are a stimulating heterogeneity of different ages, classes, life styles. Holland is a small country; people with very different lives inevitably rub shoulders. I like the diversity but I sometimes feel oppressed by the crowdedness, the lack of privacy with everyone knowing everyone, and the liberal tolerance (for example, of lesbians) which is often more based on familiarity than on political awareness. Coziness, connectedness, and relative freedom from blatant discriminations is the liberating side of this small, public, refreshingly decent country.

Community groups meet either weekly or bi-weekly. Every six weeks at least one representative from each of about 40 groups comes together for a "Land Day" to work on organization, issues, and development. Each land day is in a different part of the country, north-central-south, and is organized and facilitated by a different group from that area. The meetings are usually held in a Women's House. There is also a quarterly FORT magazine which is published for several issues by alternate groups. Most facilitators of groups do not charge money although some, like myself, do. Earning

money from feminist work is a controversial issue now in FORT as well as throughout the Dutch Women's Movement.

Participating in a feminist process in a foreign culture illuminates not only that culture but also my own. I have been surprised to find how Jewish, how lesbian, and most surprising, how American I am. Identifying as American was the most difficult for me and, despite it being my most conspicuous identity, it was the part of me I continually discounted if not denied. Living here and especially doing groups here have raised my consciousness on many issues such as the alienation of being a foreigner, the isolation of being a leader, and the reality of the extermination of European Jewry. Living here is an eye-opener and often a gut-twister. Radical Therapy helps me to keep my eyes open, to identify with people, and to act with collective support. Re-Evaluation Counseling helps me to let my guts unwind and to remember who I am. Both Radical Therapy and Re-evaluation Counseling try to incorporate all of these head, gut, and action processes.

I work well with one foot in each ocean.

1. Jackins, Harvey: *Guidebook to Re-evaluation Counseling*, Seattle: Rational Island, 1975; *The Human Side of Human Beings*, Seattle: Rational Island, 1965; *The Human Situation*, Seattle, Rational Island, 1973. For other RC literature or information, write to: Personal Counselors, 719 Second Ave. North, Seattle, Washington 98109. Feedback or questions related to this article are welcome and may be addressed to: Gail Pheterson, Zocherstraat 33<sup>I</sup> Amsterdam, Holland.

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