

GRACE NOTES XIII

DR SALMA SIDDIQUE asks us
to consider the potential bias and ideology
behind research

RESearch PROCESSES AND/OR statistics were frequently quoted in the media at the time of the general election, usually with different interpretations depending on the political party. This begs the question of whether research can offer us anything to improve our therapeutic practice or should we always remain cynical and questioning of the 'facts' of research? When the social psychologist Stanley Milgram (1992) reflected on the nature of research he asked 'what is the use of such a [research] study?' The criticism implied in this question has bothered me, for any activity seems to me of value if it satisfies curiosity, stimulates ideas, and gives a new slant to our understanding of the social worlds and our place in it. The slant is essentially through the meanings that we make in relationships in which students learn the 'tricks of the trade' passed down the trans-generational script (Noriegia, 2010).

The way in which ideology and mythology operate is very similar to scripts in Transactional Analysis (Berne, 1961) ie a system of ideas and beliefs that inform our thinking about what has gone before and how the past is presented (Jacobs, 2004). This is usually through a story of origin to explain a phenomenon, custom or ritual where rules of institutions need to be adhered to in order for the group, community or society to function morally and effectively. Within research, this story (Yalom, 2015) can be demeaned as the unscientific account. Qualitative research methodology is still struggling to be accepted as valid as the 'scientific encounter'. I would suggest that research has an over-dependence on manuals in symptomising a way of being with a lack of accounting for difference, diversity of personalities, experiences and

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social contexts. Instead it focuses on the objectification of lived experience by clinical descriptions of symptoms, with little attention given to essential first-person perspectives in research such as those auto-ethnography/self-story can offer. (Siddique,2012)

In the recent news pages of *Therapy Today* (news section:2015) there was an article announcing 'IAPT therapists to be placed in Job Centres'. This is seen as a part of the government's ideological/script of helping people with depression and anxiety by connecting employment with fitness to work. How much of our work as counsellors working in the job centre is about becoming the handmaiden of the state? Professionals such as counsellors, social workers and doctors authenticate a person being sick through a diagnostic label. This legitimises the 'sick role' enabling society to give a more lenient set of expectations on that individual.

Research is rarely unbiased or ideologically free from political and socio-economic manipulation. There are cases of historical research which were inbuilt with cultural and gender based bias. For example, the case of race and IQ being linked. Fischer et al (1996) argued that research conducted by Murray and Hernstein (1994) was flawed because there was no evidence that the statistical analysis of the bell curve – without a shadow of doubt – found a significant relationship between IQ, genetics and race. There were other factors to be considered for low educational achievement such as environmental factors, discrimination, the lack of regular employment, poverty, poor housing, social relationship and failing schools. Let's focus on the big picture: what are the fictions we live by and the tales we tell from the counselling room? (Yaxley-Smith, 2015).

The Grimms (2009) fairytale of 'the three little pigs' based on the German folktales of 'the wolf and the seven young children' could be about the various morals embedded within the western work ethic. It is told as a tale of contrast which holds the good and bad split with the implication that you have the choice of selecting a path. The three little pigs went into the world to 'seek out their fortune'. This fairytale seems to be a very contemporary story about the horrific tales of African and Middle Eastern economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Once each 'pig' was settled, they built their houses from very different materials and spent differing amounts of time constructing each house. The material used in the first two self-builds was of sticks and straw. The last which took the longest to build, costing most for materials and architect, was a grand design out of bricks and was not able to be blown down by the big bad wolf's 'huff and puff.' Maybe, the reason the first pigs couldn't afford materials was not because of their laziness and excessive partying on the weekends but rather their dependency on zero hours contracts which meant they could only afford to build on a flood plain in an

environment of high crime, poor public transport, food banks and failing schools. Such a fairytale can be transformed as a living nightmare and exploited by some politicians in our present elections. Perhaps counsellors and therapists need to be more aware of their (unwitting) collusion in research and (fairy)tales!

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