

*“If we were all to sit in a circle and confess our sins, we would laugh at each other for a lack of originality” (Kahlil Gibran)*



Many people wonder what really goes on behind the doors of counselling and psychotherapy...Sitcoms and comedies portray some person lying on a couch whilst the ‘therapist’ remains out of sight, allowing a client to just ramble with free associations (whilst the therapist is either furiously making notes or worse...falling asleep)...

So I want to invite you to come behind the scenes of what really goes on when your students are called out of the class to see me, or perhaps what goes on when someone ‘goes to see someone’...

I think the above quote really captures what goes on ‘in session’. Sometimes it’s ‘our perceived sins’ or shortcomings that people try to grapple with. Other times it’s a space to try to make sense of situations, events, other people’s behaviour and that of

our own. Often times it's to try to disentangle oneself from the horrid feeling of 'cognitive dissonance'. Essentially where our thoughts and beliefs are not consistent with our behaviour. Closely related is where our 'less than kind' beliefs about our-self (or our expectations about others) keep tripping us over as we try to walk the pathway of this thing called life. But regardless, rest assured that whatever a person perceives to be so ghastly or so shameful, there is a high probability that what someone struggles so hard to 'share' has usually been heard many times by a well-seasoned therapist.

As someone who draws from a range of therapeutic techniques, I am always interested in not only the content of a person or student's story, but how they tell their story. The narratives that they use to describe how they come to see, be, feel, make sense and ultimately interact in this world and perhaps the narratives that others would use to describe their experiences with the same person. I am always attuned to looking for 'the exceptions to the story' or as family therapists would say "the news of difference'. I am often tracking things like the duration, intensity and frequency of what people experience (especially symptoms).

Metaphorically, I often envisage an imaginary 'hat or coat' stand that sits out the front of my door. Except it's not the hat or coat that's get hung there. It's the person's ego, where for a brief moment in time, someone can sit, be, scream, cry, rejoice, contemplate, imagine or even just breathe. They can momentarily be unburdened by the 'pressure to be or perform' without a skerrick of judgement from me. It is in the sharing, that I make space for the person's 'different part of themselves' to chime in, have their say and then sit back down. It is usually when these parts end up in conflict that people end up in strife. This is the internal conflict, the battle that people often struggle with the most. The struggle is often what leads to the acting out behaviours or the forms of self-sabotage or in worse case scenarios, substance dependence, disordered eating or self-harm and compromised relationships with others.

It is fascinating to observe how our stories change over the course of our lives. The weight connected with certain chapters in our life (the ones we thought at one point were too heavy to carry where we thought we would buckle under the sheer weight), starts to lighten or perhaps the weight starts to feel more evenly distributed. Perhaps that is what counselling offers. It the chance to share the load. Truth be told often times people carry far too many 'should's, musts, always and never's that they have either imposed on themselves when young, as means of surviving or at least 'trying to feel okay', or it's the ideals/ beliefs and expectations imposed by others (usually care givers) that they get weighed down by. Sometimes those strongly held beliefs have never been really examined, they have simply been handed down from one generation to the next without any time to really ponder how relevant or applicable such information is in the 'here and now'. Some legacies are worth holding on to, others perhaps have ran their course and perhaps lead to restrictive ways of being. Counselling can help shine some light on such challenges.