



# The Women Who Changed Counselling

Much of the history of counselling and psychotherapy may at first sight appear to be dominated by men, but in fact there have been – and continue to be – many hugely influential women in this field. Here, we give some examples of such women and their contributions to counselling theory and practice.

## Jessie Taft

In the early 1930s, Rogers was working with disturbed children at the Rochester Child Guidance Center. There, Jessie Taft – a female social worker who had translated Otto Rank's work from German into English – introduced Rogers to Rank's ideas on here-and-now therapy:

The application of Rank's theories to play therapy by Taft led to certain significant changes in the aims and methods of psychotherapeutic work with children ... An essential feature of Rankian or relationship therapy is its conception of a certain kind of therapeutic relationship as being curative in its own right. (Rogers, 1951: 236)

It was not unusual at that time for lesbian couples, especially when they were social workers, to adopt children – and Jessie Taft, having adopted two children with her partner Virginia Robinson, is said to have written to a colleague: 'We feel very much like a family and sometimes wonder whether we are going to live through it.'

## Laura Perls

Fritz Perls is well known as the gestalt psychotherapist who featured in 1964 in Everett Shostrom's 'Three Approaches to Therapy' – or, as they are more commonly known, 'the Gloria Films'. His wife Laura, herself a gestalt psychologist as early as the 1920s, may be less famous than Fritz but did a huge amount of the work in developing the gestalt approach. Indeed, it was Laura who noticed how their children ingested food after their move from Germany to South Africa (when the Nazis made it impossible for them – with their Jewish background – to stay in Germany).

### Other key women in counselling include:

- Petruska Clarkson – the psychologist who proposed the philosophical idea of intersubjectivity
- Anna Freud – the psychoanalyst who looked in depth at the fantasy lives of infants from birth
- Melanie Klein – the psychoanalyst who worked extensively on child analysis
- Margaret Mahler – the medical doctor who came up with the separation-individuation theory of child development
- Francine Shapiro – the psychologist who invented eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR), the primary treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) endorsed by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence
- Margaret Warner – the psychologist who developed the concept of fragile process.

## Clients and Relatives

It was during Rogers' time at the Rochester Child Guidance Centre that the mother of one young client challenged his diagnostic approach to therapy. Rogers had claimed that her early rejection of her son had caused the child's issues. Her rejection of this diagnosis influenced the development of person-centred therapy.

Last but by no means least, Gloria Szymanski, the client in Shostrom's 'Three Approaches to Therapy', also served to raise public awareness of therapy, though was exploited in so doing, as she had been told the films were for private academic training use only. Yet they ended up being shown in full in cinemas.

## Reference

Rogers (1951) *Client-Centered Therapy*, Constable