

## EDITORIAL

Renzo Carli

1.

Psychologists, at least in Italy<sup>1</sup>, do not seem particularly interested in knowing what expectations “others” have of their profession; they do not seem keen to discover the social demand, the mode of representation or if you like the image of the psychologist and of his/her profession; they do not seem overly inclined to identify how these aspects are stratified in the culture in which the psychologist works. Research carried out in the recent past has often studied the representation of the psychologist on the part of psychologists themselves and of psychology students. The “others” questioned about the image of the psychologist have mainly been teachers.

This is therefore our first piece of data: there is little research into the representation of the profession and the figure of the psychologist; very rarely are “others” interviewed, the so-called laymen, the population of a specific place, the people who are the psychologist’s potential clients. The second, no less important piece of data is that the outcome of the research carried out essentially reveals one constant element: psychologists identify the psychology profession with psychotherapy.

The limited amount of data related to the demand made of psychologists, among the population of Latium<sup>2</sup> (Carli & Salvatore, 2001), Tuscany<sup>3</sup> (Carli, Paniccia & Salvatore, 2004) and more recently, in a representative sample of the Italian population (Summo, 2005) shows, on the other hand, that the expectation is of a professional role in *integrating the differences* within the social context.

What psychology supplies is related to *psychotherapy*. What is demanded is related to processes of *integration*.

*The science of Psychology, more than the psychologist, is seen as dealing with relationships.* With relationships, not with individuals. It is interesting that situations that tend to be seen as subject to individual interventions (think of the issues of immigrant workers, the differently able, and violent deviance in the most varied contexts) are associated with other situations that have traditionally received social attention (for instance, with the question of development within organizations for production, and above all, services; with personnel training designed to foster client-oriented behaviour). The demand registered evidently calls for greater competence on the part of psychologists and a coherent response on the part of the institutions responsible for training the psychologists themselves.

Here it would be useful to add to the data from the research into psychologists’ interest in psychotherapy. Studies carried out by the chair of Clinical Psychology of the Faculty of Psychology 1, at *La Sapienza*, Rome, among the population of psychologists of Arezzo in 1999, and of three Local Health areas (Asl) in Lazio (1998 -2004)<sup>4</sup>, reveal an interesting fact. The main interest, given top priority by psychologists working for the national health service, seems to be that of belonging to and benefiting from solid systems of belonging. The interest in psychotherapy can be defined as what follows from the establishment of belonging. For the psychologists we are talking about, the orientation towards relating seems mainly self-referential. It is an interest in the relationship *between psychologists* and is related to the social mandate, as the main container and organizer of relations with the client. It is therefore understandable that many psychologists, concerned about setting up systems of membership, cannot avoid directing their interests towards psychotherapy and to forms of membership which, often but not necessarily, are not only offered but also prescribed by psychotherapy. It has long been understood that one cannot deal with other people’s inner world without having understood one’s own; today another problem has arisen: one cannot help others to relate to the context, without

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<sup>1</sup> The National Order of Psychologists has only recently set up an Observatory on the psychology profession in which a group of experts has been invited to propose research and related initiatives.

<sup>2</sup> Italian region.

<sup>3</sup> Italian region.

<sup>4</sup> These research works have not yet been published.

first gaining the emotional competences, with specific reference to one's own relations, not only with the family but in civil and professional domains.

This leads to the great subject of university and post-university training of psychologists. These are contexts in which psychologists experience intense, clinically significant relations, strongly influenced by learning processes and constituting learning itself. One must ask: to what extent does psychological learning concern these relations with the context? To what extent do these relations become the subject of analysis for the development of psychological competence, or to what extent are they left out of learning and training, becoming the place of often violent acting-out, and the source of response-dependence (idealizing and/or furious) or of anomie. For instance, they may be the source of a radical lack of confidence in the idea that it is possible to intervene in problems for which "others", participants in our research, ask psychologists for help. We are thinking of the important question of relations with power, which for psychologists lacking in specific training in this sector, is often an *ubi maior* before which one can only bow (*minor cessat*). And yet this is also, and above all, one of the reasons why "others" are contacting them.

2.

There are two paths in the process of integration of diversity: one proposed by Anglo-Saxon culture and the other followed by French culture.

The Anglo-Saxon way is usually indicated as the strategy of *tolerance*: it envisages that the single communities, while inspired by different ideologies and rules, can be self-managed in complete autonomy within the broader social system, each with its own representatives who guarantee the respect for the rules governing the co-living between groups. Each one is the boss in his own house, but the condominium rules must be guaranteed.

The French way, on the other hand, is the path of *secularism*. All the participants in the life of society, whatever their differences, are guaranteed an equal right to be recognised, to enjoy freedom of thought and association, and citizenship. However, the social pact envisages the renunciation of imposing one's own ideas on others; the acceptance of the common laws is imperative.

This debate on the integration of diversity and on the rules of the game in co-living, has much broader boundaries than those marked out by the immigration to western countries. It directly concerns, and it is on this point that we intend to arouse the readers' attention, the co-existence of models, practices and ideologies of clinical psychology and of psychotherapy.

Are we inclined to embrace tolerance, or do we prefer to follow the path of secularism? It is an important question if we think of psychology as a science that deals with co-living and that wants to intervene in the problems posed by living together.

We believe that the defence of secularism is not an ideology like the others, subject to discussion and to contradictory positions. As Laoukili and Diet (2005) argue, "What we have to understand is that secularism, if it is seen as primary symbolic violence, presents itself as the founder, the value and the principle of a narcissistic social contract that allows subjective singularity and supports citizenship and the trans-subjective bond. Being a guarantee offered to all subjects endowed with power, in particular thanks to schooling, it makes it possible to escape from the potentially totalitarian predominance of primary membership groups, and to choose secondary membership groups. These groups, in their beliefs and practices, will seem to deserve this investment and enable the subjects to develop their thinking and subjective autonomy" (p. 8).

On closer inspection, secularism represents the guarantee of the value of respect for the *rules of the game* governing living together. If we think of clinical psychology as a science that deals with co-living and that intends to intervene in the problems of living together, we can understand the importance of secularism for clinical psychologists. In this sense the notion of intelligence can also be reformulated: a notion that, in the perspective proposed here, can be defined as competence in living together and in facilitating the development of systems of co-living.

Today tolerance seems to prevail, with the idea that there is room for everyone and for all the models of co-living; that it does not take much to accept and tolerate the style of co-living that the various scientific, religious, cultural, political or economic hegemonies want to impose. And it does not take much to provide a justification for them, to endorse the violence implicit in these

ways of co-living, imposed by reason of a culture or a tradition. What tolerance does not permit is development. What tolerance endorses is the perpetuation of the *status quo*.

Reflection on secularism, on the values underlying secular co-living, is an objective that the *Rivista di Psicologia Clinica* intends to pursue. Debate on the secularism of Clinical Psychology is what the journal intends to provoke.

#### References

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