



Rediscovering Humanistic Psychology: Understanding Its Complicated History

A Review of

Encountering America: Humanistic Psychology, Sixties Culture and the Shaping of the Modern Self

by Jessica Grogan

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Reviewed by

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Humanistic psychology has a complex and often-distorted history. Although the early humanistic psychologists were dissatisfied with directions of behaviorism and psychoanalytic thought, it was not, as often is espoused, merely a reaction against these dominant forces of the time. There was also something to humanistic psychology; it was seeking something and aspired to something more. The individuals who came together to form humanistic psychology, as well as those who were drawn to it, were a very diverse group of thinkers. Thus, from the beginning, it was difficult to come to an agreement on what humanistic psychology was and how it should be defined. Over time, many different approaches and applications within professional psychology and beyond were identified as being part of humanistic psychology. It is no wonder that there is confusion about the history of humanistic psychology.

Jessica Grogan, in her book *Encountering America: Humanistic Psychology, Sixties Culture and the Shaping of the Modern Self*, writes a very different history of humanistic psychology compared with the others available. She focuses on how the 1960s culture played an important role in both the growth and demise of humanistic psychology. In the first seven chapters, Grogan focuses on the early history of humanistic psychology, including the many challenges it faced in becoming an established force in professional psychology. In this part of the book, her sympathies toward the humanistic approach are evident as she accounts how, despite many challenges, humanistic psychology found its way to having a place in the profession of psychology.

Starting in Chapter 8, the tone begins to gradually change as Grogan begins to focus on the controversial aspects of humanistic psychology's history. These subsequent chapters cover Esalen, psychedelics, and the encounter group movement, as well as humanistic psychology's attempts and failures with the women's movement and multiculturalism, particularly focusing on the "black-white encounter" (p. viii).

At the conclusion of the book, Grogan seems to proclaim that humanistic psychology has lost its influence as an independent school of thought. Although it is accurate that humanistic psychology lost some of its influence and for a period of time was in jeopardy of no longer being a force in psychology, Grogan unfortunately seems unaware that humanistic psychology has once again been growing in influence over the past decade and remains an important, vital, and influential school of thought today.

The Fringe Is Not the Whole

In historical and cultural analyses, humanistic psychology often becomes closely identified with, and ultimately deemed responsible for, the fringe elements and extreme manifestations of the human potential movement. To her credit, Grogan at times attempts to delicately extricate the innovative clinical approaches as well as the academic and scholarly contributions of the third-wave founders from the disintegration of sociocultural norms evident in fringe elements, including the Merry Pranksters, Erhard Seminars Training (EST), and the more questionable, regressive, and hedonistic elements of the counterculture of the 1960s. However, it is more appropriate to separately view these fringe elements as distinct representations and expressions of the multiple social and cultural dynamics, tensions, ruptures, and influences that captured a subculture in the spirit of those particular times.

Grogan's work fails to articulate that the third-wave founders and the fringe elements sometimes associated with it had, at best, a loose association while maintaining distinct and disparate tenets. Humanistic psychology sought to expand the reach of psychology as a person-centered science and to draw upon the humanities, arts, and philosophy to inform our understanding of the human experience, not to morph turbulent social movements. Grogan, at times, conflates these two efforts rather than explicate their important differences.

The Ongoing Scholarship

Grogan's exclusion of the rich, present-day scholarship of the "third force" perpetuates the erroneous accusation that humanistic psychology is anti-intellectual and has faded into irrelevancy. Despite the book's wide-ranging exploration of humanistic psychology's history, there is an unfortunate lack of acknowledgment of contemporary humanistic intellectual, academic, and clinical applications to psychology. Grogan pays little attention to humanistic psychology's presence within the American Psychological Association (APA) for the last 40 years—most notably that of Division 32, the Society for Humanistic Psychology. Grogan also omits the ongoing contributions of the two major humanistic journals and the many academic institutions that offer graduate training programs in humanistic clinical psychology.

Since 1971, APA Division 32 has served as the philosophical, intellectual, and academic home of humanistic psychology in the United States. The division publishes the journal *The Humanistic Psychologist*, and the executive board identifies and mentors emerging leaders in humanistic psychology. The hosting of hospitality suites at the APA Annual Convention was started by Division 32 to provide training and community experiences for its membership—now, many divisions of APA host hospitality suites. Each year, Division 32

offers several days of humanistic programming and presentations in its hospitality suite for all students and practitioners who are interested.

Grogan details the very beginnings of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, when predictably the founders of the movement were the most frequent authors. However, she fails to acknowledge the longevity, diversity of topics and authors, and global reach that the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* has achieved over the past 50 years to the present day. In addition, APA Division 32's *The Humanistic Psychologist*, with its 40-year history and wide-ranging catalog of articles as well as influential authors and researchers in humanistic psychology, is not mentioned at all.

Finally, a puzzling oversight is the well-established cadre of graduate-degree-granting academic institutions that train and teach according to the values and principles of humanistic education and humanistic psychology. Several of the schools banded together to form the Consortium of Diversified Programs in Psychology and in the 1980s and 1990s discussed forming an alternative accreditation to APA's, one that would more fully respect the training and education of humanistic graduate schools. Unfortunately, that initiative was never realized.

Yet it is important to recognize the prominent schools of humanistic psychology in the United States: Saybrook University, California Institute of Integral Studies, John F. Kennedy University, Sophia University, Pacifica Graduate Institute, Sonoma State University, Seattle University, Naropa University, Michigan School of Professional Psychology, Chicago School of Professional Psychology, University of West Georgia, University of Dallas, Duquesne University, Point Park University, Union Institute, Immaculata University, University of Memphis, and Fordham University. Internationally, there are strong humanistic institutions in Brazil, Canada, England, Greece, Portugal, and Italy, as well as rapidly growing interest in China and other Southeast Asian countries.

Diversity

Humanistic psychology grew up and flourished during a time when the civil rights and women's liberation movements were bringing about important cultural change in the United States. These movements also shared many values with humanistic psychology. Given this, it is quite odd that humanistic psychology has struggled greatly with multicultural issues. As Hoffman, Cleare-Hoffman, and Jackson (in press) have illustrated, it is only within the last few years that humanistic psychology has begun to address diversity issues consistently on a substantive level.

Grogan provides one of the most detailed and honest portrayals of the early struggles of humanistic psychology with diversity issues. She highlights some of humanistic psychology's attempts to address racial issues, such as in the Black-White encounter groups, giving an honest portrayal of many of the struggles. Humanistic psychology was not very involved in the civil rights movement and, with a few exceptions, was resistant to dealing with diversity issues. Grogan even details the resistance of Rogers and Maslow with regard to diversity. In many ways, humanistic psychology's early history with diversity issues is summarized well in a quote from Richard Farson: "Humanistic psychology, like all of psychology, was dragged kicking and screaming through every liberation movement. It was embarrassing how far behind the curve we were" (as cited in Grogan, p. 256). Yet it is important to note that in

recent years humanistic psychology has made important strides in addressing diversity issues (see Hoffman et al., in press). The diversity programming at the Society for Humanistic Psychology's Annual Conference is among the most popular and quickly growing sessions.

Conclusion: Contemporary Humanistic Psychology Is Alive and Well

Encountering America is an important book on the history of humanistic psychology. It is one of the most comprehensive histories and covers aspects, such as multiculturalism, that are often neglected. We appreciated, too, that Grogan attempts to distinguish the core of humanistic psychology from some of the offshoots that get associated with it, such as the human potential movement. But by focusing much of her attention on some of the fringe movements and controversies, in some ways she replicates the common misperceptions of humanistic psychology.

However, the biggest limitation of the book is that Grogan seems rather uninformed about the recent developments and current status of humanistic psychology. Unfortunately, Grogan's lack of awareness about the vitality and growing interest in contemporary humanistic psychology as well as about the wealth of influential contemporary scholarship leads her to distort the later history of humanistic psychology. In order to understand the present, we need to understand history. However, in order to correctly understand history, we also need to be informed about the present.

After reading Grogan's book, one could easily think that the humanistic psychology movement is essentially dead. The influence that remains, she seems to suggest, is just what has been incorporated and assimilated into other contemporary approaches to psychology. However, we think it is important to strongly proclaim that humanistic psychology as a school of thought and practice is alive and well. Membership in the Society for Humanistic Psychology (APA's Division 32) has grown, whereas some other divisions of the APA have struggled with membership declines. Similarly, over the last seven years the Society for Humanistic Psychology's annual conference has grown significantly in interest and attendance. Various movements around the world demonstrate that humanistic psychology is still growing and expanding. Although we appreciate Grogan bringing to light important neglected aspects of the history of humanistic psychology, we are disappointed that she concluded with an inaccurate portrayal of contemporary humanistic psychology.

As two humanistic scholars and practitioners who have taught in a number of graduate programs in psychology, we still would encourage students and other professionals who are informed about the contemporary status of humanistic psychology to read *Encountering America* but to do so with critical awareness about its misconceptions of contemporary humanistic psychology. We will likely include this book as recommended reading for students in our programs, given that they are informed about contemporary humanistic practice.

Encountering America is a history book; therefore, it may appear that we are being too hard on Grogan for not being aware of contemporary humanistic psychology, particularly given that her discussion of the history is remarkably solid scholarship. However, as scholars in humanistic psychology and graduate professors, we are deeply concerned when an

important school of thought in psychology is frequently misrepresented. It is common for us to have to “unteach” what people have learned about humanistic psychology once they reach graduate school because of how common it is for undergraduate students to be taught inaccuracies about humanistic psychology.

Given that there was a significant period from the 1980s to the early 2000s when humanistic psychology significantly decreased in size and influence, it is understandable that many scholars outside of humanistic psychology are unaware of its current status. However, a book focusing on humanistic psychology, even if primarily a history book, should present a more accurate picture of the current status of humanistic psychology than what is demonstrated in *Encountering America*. If Grogan were to replace the final chapter of the book with a chapter that recognizes the revitalization of humanistic psychology that has been occurring in the last 10 to 12 years, this could easily become an important contribution to scholarship on humanistic psychology. Her impressive knowledge of humanistic psychology appears to end a decade short.

Reference

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