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Special Issue: Counseling and Positive Psychology in dialogue: Encounters, narratives, challenges, a tribute to Professor Anastassios Stalikas

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## Counselling Psychology as a discipline of meaning, relationships, and developmental transformation

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# Counselling Psychology as a discipline of meaning, relationships, and developmental transformation

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## KEYWORDS

Counselling Psychology  
Positive Psychology  
Meaning-making  
Narrative identity  
Lifespan development  
Relational processes  
Psychological well-being  
Lived experience  
Contextual and ecological perspectives  
Developmental transitions

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## ABSTRACT

Counselling Psychology is a distinct applied psychological discipline grounded in a holistic and contextual understanding of human experience, emphasizing meaning-making, relational processes, and developmental change across the lifespan. Rooted in humanistic, existential, and contextual traditions, the field attends not only to the alleviation of distress but also to how individuals construct identity, negotiate transitions, and integrate lived experience within social and cultural contexts. This paper introduces a Special Issue that brings together conceptually coherent and methodologically diverse contributions at the intersection of Positive and Counselling Psychology. While Positive Psychology has traditionally emphasized optimal functioning and strengths, the present discussion adopts a Counselling Psychology lens, foregrounding processes of interpretation, narrative continuity, relational embeddedness, and developmental transformation. Across diverse populations, life stages, and psychosocial contexts, the contributions highlight psychological well-being as a dynamic, context-sensitive process shaped through relationships, values, and meaning-making rather than as a static outcome or purely intrapsychic state. This Special Issue illustrates how individuals actively negotiate adversity, vulnerability, and change within their everyday worlds, mobilizing psychological resources while sustaining continuity of the self. By integrating empirical research with lived experience, the collection advances Counselling Psychology as a discipline uniquely positioned to bridge theory and practice, honor human fragility alongside resilience, and inform ethically grounded, relational, and developmentally sensitive approaches to psychological well-being.

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Counselling Psychology is a distinct applied psychological discipline grounded in a holistic understanding of human experience, emphasizing meaning-making, relational processes, and developmental change across the lifespan. Rooted in humanistic, existential, and contextual traditions, the field is concerned not only with the alleviation of psychological distress but also with how individuals understand themselves, negotiate life transitions, and construct coherent identities within their social, cultural, and relational worlds (Gelso et al., 2014; Woolfe et al., 2017). Contemporary Counselling Psychology adopts a lifespan and ecological perspective, viewing psychological well-being as a dynamic and context-sensitive process shaped by relationships, narratives, and evolving life circumstances rather than as a static state or solely intrapsychic outcome (McLeod, 2023; Orlans & Van Scoyoc, 2021). In this sense, Counselling Psychology is uniquely positioned to bridge empirical research with lived experience, integrating scientific rigor with attention to subjectivity, values, and meaning.

This Special Issue brings together a conceptually coherent and methodologically diverse set of contributions that reflect the broad and evolving landscape of Positive and Counselling Psychology. The articles

included a wide range of populations, developmental stages, and psychosocial contexts, yet they are connected by a shared interest in psychological resources, adaptive processes, and the cultivation of well-being across the lifespan. In this sense, the Special Issue captures the ongoing dialogue between two closely related fields that, while distinct, share a common concern with human strengths, growth, and constructive capacities.

At the same time, Positive and Counselling Psychology differ in their primary emphasis. Positive Psychology has traditionally focused on the study of optimal functioning, strengths, and indicators of well-being. Counselling Psychology, by contrast, has been more centrally concerned with how people make sense of their lived experience within relational, cultural, and developmental contexts. Meaning-making, narrative continuity, identity development, and the quality of relationships occupy a central place in Counselling Psychology theory and practice, particularly during periods of transition, adversity, and uncertainty.

Against this background, the present editorial discussion approaches the contributions of the Special Issue through a Counselling Psychology lens. This focus does not diminish the relevance of Positive Psychology perspectives; rather, it reflects an intentional decision to foreground those dimensions of the included studies that speak most directly to counselling theory, research, and practice. From this standpoint, psychological experience is understood as fundamentally relational, contextual, and developmental, shaped through ongoing processes of interpretation and meaning-making rather than reducible to isolated symptoms or decontextualized intrapsychic mechanisms.

Accordingly, the discussion that follows focuses on how individuals interpret and narrate their experiences, negotiate critical life transitions, sustain and transform relationships, and preserve a sense of continuity of the self in the face of adversity, loss, and change. Counselling is viewed here not simply as an intervention, but as a process of accompaniment, reflection, and collaborative meaning-making, through which people are supported in integrating difficult experiences into coherent life narratives and in mobilizing psychological resources within their everyday contexts.

By adopting this counselling-oriented perspective, the editorial discussion seeks to clarify the distinctive contribution of Counselling Psychology within the broader Positive and Counselling Psychology landscape. More specifically, it aims to show how the studies brought together in this Special Issue advance an understanding of psychological well-being that goes beyond positive outcomes or strengths alone, and instead, attends to the processes through which people live with, work through, and grow from complexity, vulnerability, and change. In doing so, Counselling Psychology is positioned as a discipline uniquely suited to bridge empirical research with lived experience, and to inform psychologically grounded practices that respect both human resilience and human fragility.

The conceptual foundation of this Special Issue is established by Delle Fave, whose conceptualization of well-being as a dynamic and sustainable process resonates strongly with Counselling Psychology's longstanding emphasis on meaning, values, and development over time (McLeod, 2023; Woolfe et al., 2017).

Building on this meaning-oriented approach, Fitzpatrick and Perlinghis examine how acting on personal values contributes to the construction of a meaningful life story, highlighting narrative coherence as a central psychological resource (McAdams & McLean, 2013). A lifespan counselling perspective is further articulated by Randall, who reframes aging as an "adventure," emphasizing continued growth, reinterpretation, and psychological engagement in later life. Complementing these views, Moraitou draws on mythological narrative through the case of Oedipus, illustrating how symbolic stories function as interpretive frameworks for understanding suffering, responsibility, and transformation within counselling contexts.

Together, these contributions position meaning, narrative, and lifespan development as foundational pillars of Counselling Psychology, consistent with contemporary counselling frameworks that conceptualize psychological adaptation as an ongoing, contextually embedded process of meaning-making across the lifespan (McLeod, 2023; Orlans & Van Scoyoc, 2021).

Several studies in the Special Issue address critical developmental transitions within educational contexts, highlighting Counselling Psychology's relevance to institutional and preventive settings. Vleioras and his colleagues conceptualize the first university experience as a major developmental turning point involving emotional vulnerability, identity negotiation, and shifts in relational roles. Their findings underscore the psychological significance of transition periods, during which individuals are particularly sensitive to contextual support.

The relational climate of academic environments is further examined by Touloupis and his colleagues, who investigate students' sense of belonging in relation to sexual harassment and negative emotional states. Their study demonstrates how unsafe and exclusionary environments undermine psychological adjustment, reinforcing a Counselling Psychology understanding of distress as embedded in relational and institutional contexts rather than individual deficit.

The importance of psychological support during university transitions is further highlighted by Parpottas and his colleagues, who show that engagement in personal therapy is associated with enhanced university adaptation, psychological resilience, and life satisfaction. Collectively, these studies emphasize Counselling Psychology's preventive and systemic role within educational institutions (McLeod, 2023; Woolfe et al., 2017).

A Counselling Psychology perspective on adaptation during crisis is articulated by Anagnostou and Giovazolias, who examined how coping strategies and social support shape the relationship between fear of COVID-19 and posttraumatic growth. Their findings foreground meaning-making and relational resources as central mechanisms of psychological integration (Park, 2010).

Internal psychological resources are further examined by Lianou and Malikiosi-Loizou, who identify character strengths as predictors of resilience during critical life periods, reinforcing a counselling view of strengths as dynamic resources activated in response to contextual demands. Within this meaning-oriented framework, Olympiou and her colleagues contribute a systematic review and meta-analysis titled "The appreciation of beauty and excellence as a character strength", demonstrating that aesthetic engagement is associated with psychophysiological regulation, adaptive functioning, and well-being. From a Counselling Psychology perspective, this work highlights experiential and affective pathways through which individuals restore balance and meaning.

Relational processes constitute a central axis of the Special Issue and reflect a defining feature of Counselling Psychology. Kounenou and her colleagues examine how perceptions of early attachment experiences are associated with the quality of adult romantic relationships, highlighting developmental continuity in relational patterns. In adulthood, Karakasidou and her colleagues explore the influence of self-compassion, mental health, and happiness on positive relationships, demonstrating that the way individuals relate to themselves significantly shapes their capacity for supportive and meaningful interpersonal connections.

Earlier relational development is addressed by Tsitos and Mantoglou, who examine the sociopsychological construction of friendship in middle adolescence, emphasizing the role of gender, social class, and cultural context. Together, these studies position relationships as primary contexts in which identity, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being are negotiated and sustained (Gelso et al., 2014; Orlans & Van Scoyoc, 2021).

The intersection of emotional experience and learning is explored by Polychrioni and her colleagues, who examine adolescents' psychosocial and learning adaptation during distance and in-person education. Their findings illustrate how contextual disruptions reshape emotional regulation, motivation, and engagement.

A counselling-oriented conceptualization of anxiety is offered by Vasilaki and Anastasakis, who frame mathematics anxiety as a process of appraisal shaped by personal narratives and prior experiences rather than

as a static trait. This perspective aligns with Counselling Psychology's emphasis on meaning construction and interpretive flexibility in understanding emotional distress (McLeod, 2023).

Several contributions foreground populations experiencing heightened vulnerability, reinforcing Counselling Psychology's ethical and social commitments. Vitzilaios and Kourkoutas examine how parents of children with autism reconstruct continuity of the self through narrative processes despite profound life disruptions. Kastrouni and Vorria explore the experiences, adversities, and psychological resources of unaccompanied refugee minors, emphasizing voice, agency, and contextual understanding. A phenomenological exploration of bodily experience and identity is provided by Mitsi and Issari, who examine the lived experience of individuals with an additional limb.

These studies underscore the importance of non-pathologizing, context-sensitive counselling approaches that respect lived experience and promote empowerment (Prilleltensky, 2012; McLeod, 2023).

A Counselling Psychology perspective on health-related adversity is articulated by Vasilopoulou and her colleagues, who examine optimism and family resilience in cancer patient-partner dyads. Their findings highlight adaptation as a relational and systemic process embedded within family dynamics rather than an individual endeavor (see also Rolland, 2018; Orlans & Van Scoyoc, 2021).

The Special Issue concludes by turning attention to the professional self and the therapeutic process. Markozannes and Kleftras examine mental health professionals' causal attributions regarding borderline personality disorder and their associations with self-efficacy and quality of professional life, highlighting the impact of professional beliefs on practice and well-being. Apostolopoulou focuses on therapists' experiences of managing endings in brief psychotherapy, illuminating the emotional and ethical complexity of therapeutic closure.

These contributions reinforce Counselling Psychology's emphasis on reflexivity, self-awareness, and ethical responsibility, underscoring that the counsellor's experience is integral to effective practice.

Taken as a whole, the contributions included in this Special Issue present Counselling Psychology as a discipline grounded in meaning, relationships, and developmental transformation. Across diverse populations, contexts, and life stages, the studies illustrate that psychological experience is best understood through the lenses of lived experience, relational embeddedness, and ongoing processes of interpretation and identity construction.

Rather than framing psychological difficulties as isolated symptoms or individual deficits, the contributions emphasize how people actively negotiate adversity, transition, and change within their personal, social, and cultural worlds. Counselling is thus portrayed not as a purely technical intervention, but as a relational and meaning-oriented process that supports individuals in sustaining a sense of continuity of the self and in mobilizing psychological resources in the face of uncertainty.

Importantly, the Special Issue underscores the developmental nature of psychological adaptation. Across educational transitions, relational development, health-related challenges, experiences of vulnerability, and professional practice, psychological well-being is approached as an evolving process shaped by context, relationships, and narrative coherence over time.

The contributions also highlight the ethical and social commitments that characterize Counselling Psychology as discipline. By attending to marginalized voices, contextual constraints, and structural inequalities, the studies resist individualizing interpretations of distress and emphasize empowerment, dignity, and relational responsibility.

In this way, the Special Issue advances Counselling Psychology as a field that meaningfully bridges empirical research with lived experience, theory with practice, and individual understanding with relational and social awareness. It offers a grounded and compelling account of counselling as a discipline of

accompaniment, reflection, and transformation—one that honors both human vulnerability and the capacity for growth within the complexities of contemporary psychological life.

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## Συμβουλευτική Ψυχολογία: Νόημα, σχέσεις και αναπτυξιακός μετασχηματισμός

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ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ	ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ
Συμβουλευτική Ψυχολογία· Θετική Ψυχολογία· Νοηματοδότηση· Αφηγηματική ταυτότητα· Αναπτυξιακή προοπτική ζωής· Σχισιακές διεργασίες· Ψυχική ευεξία· Βιωμένη εμπειρία· Οικολογική και συμφραζόμενη προσέγγιση· Αναπτυξιακές μεταβάσεις	<p>Η Συμβουλευτική Ψυχολογία αποτελεί έναν διακριτό εφαρμοσμένο κλάδο της ψυχολογικής επιστήμης, ο οποίος εδράζεται σε μια ολιστική και εντός πλαισίου κατανόηση της ανθρώπινης εμπειρίας, δίνοντας έμφαση στη νοηματοδότηση, τις σχεσιακές διεργασίες και την αναπτυξιακή αλλαγή σε όλο το εύρος της ζωής. Με ρίζες στις ανθρωπιστικές, υπαρξιακές και εντός πλαισίου προσεγγίσεις, το πεδίο δεν περιορίζεται στην ανακούφιση της ψυχολογικής δυσφορίας, αλλά εστιάζει στον τρόπο με τον οποίο τα άτομα κατανοούν τον εαυτό τους, διαχειρίζονται κρίσιμες μεταβάσεις ζωής και συγκροτούν συνεκτικές ταυτότητες εντός των κοινωνικών, πολιτισμικών και σχεσιακών τους πλαισίων. Η παρούσα επιμελητική συζήτηση εισάγει ένα Ειδικό Τεύχος που συγκεντρώνει εννοιολογικά συνεκτικές και μεθοδολογικά ποικίλες συμβολές στο πεδίο της Θετικής και της Συμβουλευτικής Ψυχολογίας. Υιοθετώντας μια ρητά συμβουλευτική οπτική, το κείμενο αναδεικνύει διεργασίες νοηματοδότησης, αφηγηματικής συνέχειας, σχεσιακής ενσώματης εμπειρίας και αναπτυξιακού μετασχηματισμού, χωρίς να αποδυναμώνει τη συμβολή της Θετικής Ψυχολογίας στη μελέτη της ευημερίας και των ψυχολογικών πόρων. Οι μελέτες του τεύχους καλύπτουν διαφορετικούς πληθυσμούς, αναπτυξιακά στάδια και ψυχοκοινωνικά πλαίσια, αναδεικνύοντας την ψυχική ευεξία ως μια δυναμική, εξελισσόμενη και εντός πλαισίου διεργασία, η οποία διαμορφώνεται μέσα από σχέσεις, αφηγήσεις και αξίες, και όχι ως ένα στατικό αποτέλεσμα ή αποκλειστικά ενδοψυχικό χαρακτηριστικό. Μέσα από την εστίαση στη βιωμένη εμπειρία, τη σχεσιακή ενσώματωση και τη διαχρονική συνέχεια του εαυτού, το Ειδικό Τεύχος τοποθετεί τη Συμβουλευτική Ψυχολογία ως έναν κλάδο που γεφυρώνει ουσιαστικά την εμπειρική έρευνα με την καθημερινή ανθρώπινη εμπειρία και τη θεωρία με την πράξη, τιμώντας ταυτόχρονα την ανθρώπινη ευαλωτότητα και τη δυνατότητα ψυχολογικής ανάπτυξης.</p>
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