

Arnold Goldstein: From Counselor to Psychoeducator

Alan D. Goldberg

A proponent of the scientist-practitioner model, Arnold Goldstein has devoted his career to the study and practice of helping people change. In this interview, he discussed the origins of his interest in aggression and violence, described the development of models for enhancing prosocial skills and reflects on the current and future status of counselor education.



I met Arnold Goldstein in 1967 when I arrived in Syracuse, New York to interview for a faculty position in counselor that time Arnie was a member of the psychology department faculty, director of the psychology department's Counseling and Psychotherapy Center, and one of many people with whom I met during the interview process.

Frankly, other than a discussion of whether one could find good bagels in Syracuse, I remember little from our initial meeting. I did not imagine that 30 years later I would be conducting an exit interview with him on the completion of his 34 years as a faculty member at Syracuse University, the last 12 in the School of Education.

It is difficult to provide a brief description of someone whose 18-page vitae includes, at last count, 45 books, 85 articles and book chapters, more than 100 invited presentations and workshops at universities, medical schools, mental health centers, and more than 100 school districts. His writings and workshops on helping mental health professionals understand and cope with aggression and violence have had a significant impact on the practice of both counseling and counselor education. While recognizing the complex interaction between violence outside the school and aggressive behavior and violence inside the school, his books and workshops on skillstreaming and aggression replacement training have provided counselors and teachers with practical procedures for reducing violence, emphasizing prosocial interventions as part of a developmental curriculum rather than remedial practice. In 1996, he received the Career Achievement Award from the American Psychological Association.

Alan D. Goldberg is an associate professor and chair of the Program in Counseling & Human Services at Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. Correspondence regarding this interview should be sent to Alan D. Goldberg, Program in Counseling & Human Services, Syracuse University, 265 Huntington Hall, Syracuse, NY 13244 (e-mail: adgoldbe@sued.syr.edu).

GETTING STARTED

Alan D. Goldberg (ADG): *Arnie, although we've known each other for a long time, I really don't know how you got started.*

Arnold Goldstein (AG): I came from a working class background, which influenced not only where I went to college but much of what I studied. Back in the 50s, when I started college, the choice for me was to go to a free college or not go at all. The City College of New York had, I think, a general fee of \$18 a year and that was it. I really didn't know what I wanted to do and I wound up going to CCNY's Business School. After the usual flitting around to several different majors I wound up in industrial psychology. I then gravitated toward clinical psychology, receiving my master's degree from CCNY and my doctorate from Penn State.

ADG: Why Penn State?

AG: I'd like to give a really wise reason, like I surveyed all the universities and discerned their theoretical perspectives. The reality was that I was working at a state hospital and waiting for my wife to finish her master's degree. Our arrangement was that she would finish mid academic year and I would start my doctorate at midyear. I wrote to many universities; four of them accepted students at midyear and one of these was Penn State.

ADG: Was it a good decision?

AG: Being a typical New Yorker, I viewed Penn State as basically a West Coast university. When I arrived there in January of 1956 and stood up and turned toward the west, I was stunned that I couldn't see the Pacific Ocean. However, it turns out to have been an exceedingly happy choice. It was an outstanding program, with a faculty who have been very influential in my life and a chance to make some lifelong friends whom I still cherish.

ADG: *Who were some of these mentors and friends?*

AG: My first mentor was William Snyder, one of Carl Rogers's students, who ran the clinical program. He not only embraced the nondirected perspective, but Rogers's pioneering notion about studying psychotherapy naturalistically. Snyder's way of dealing with graduate research was to form research groups to study psychotherapy. Several students would band together to study the same year or two of therapy with the same clients. I was in a group of two. Ken Heller, also a lifelong friend, and I each studied a chunk of therapy in totally different ways. One of the other Penn Staters who has been especially significant for me as both a special friend and in my personal life is Don Ford, who is only a few years older than I, but has been my lifelong mentor. When I write something and I want a straight, no-holds-barred, fair response, I send it to Ford. So here 30 some years into my career, I've been very fortunate not only to be in a mentoring stage in my own life but to also still have a mentor. So I would say it's a Rogers to Snyder to Ford to Goldstein sequence.

ADG: *How has this model of studying psychotherapy naturalistically influenced your professional career?*

AG: I remain amongst that group who believes in the scientist-practitioner model; that to be successful in doing work in this profession, you must be both a scientist and a practitioner and that one informs the other. Both on a personal level and in a community sense, the practitioners feed the researchers and the researchers feed the practitioners. When the doctor of psychology programs started I thought that was too bad, because then you're basically teaching the art, but how is the art going to grow? So the message I learned at Penn State was terribly important. Snyder did therapy. Snyder studied therapy. Ford also. I also.

ADG: *So you believe it important for practitioners to study therapy as well as to do therapy to become better at it.*

AG: That's right and to understand the research literature. If they feel that the research literature has too much emphasis on rigor and not enough on clinical relevance, then it's their responsibility to make it more relevant.

ADG: *You've used the word psychotherapy rather than counseling. Do you see differences between the two?*

AG: Well it's interesting, there's one more mentor in my life, almost an idol, and that's Jerome Frank, the psychiatrist. In his early writings, some chances I had to visit with him, and certainly in his book, *Persuasion and Healing* [Frank, 1961], he made the very clear point that all of us, whether in school psychology, clinical psychology, counseling, or social work are interested in changing human behavior. Perhaps formal disciplines that divide up human behavior are necessary because the world has to be organized and because a dean has to know what department we're in. But unfortunately it's to our detriment. Back some 30 or 40 years ago, with a fair amount of energy you could

read broadly. The single best lesson I learned at Penn State was the unity of knowledge. I wound up reading not only in clinical psychology, but also in counseling, in developmental psychology, in social psychology, and outside of psychology as well.

GETTING THERE

ADG: *You mentioned that coming from a working-class background influenced much of what you have studied.*

AG: Very definitely. Growing up during the Depression I always had an abiding interest in urban issues, social class, and poverty. Perhaps the best example is that for the last 15 to 20 years my main focus has been on delinquent and aggressive inner city kids. Quite frankly, when I get together with a group of kids like that I feel like I've gone home. It just feels comfortable, so that's been one very clear consequence of growing up in that kind of environment.

ADG: *How has this interest evolved?*

AG: As early as my dissertation on "Therapist-Patient Expectancies in Counseling and Psychotherapy," and because of the ecumenical attitude at Penn State, I began reading about expectancy and level of aspiration work in social and developmental psychology. A fair amount of my first book, which was on the role of the participants' expectations in psychotherapy and counseling, also spoke about the role of expectations in nonclinical as well as clinical contexts.

Probably the single most exciting thing that I ever did in my career was a book with two good colleagues, Lee Sechrest and Ken Heller [Goldstein, Heller, and Sechrist, 1966], titled *Psychotherapy and the Psychology of Behavior Change*, which plumbed the research literature in social psychology for its hypotheses about counseling and psychotherapy. Well, if I'm urging others to look at psychotherapy and counseling the perspective of social psychology, I've got to do it, too. So I did this research series from the social psychological work on interpersonal attraction: How much do people like each other and how can you make them like each other more as it related to the counselor-client relationship? The bottom line from that research program was that eight or nine social-psychological interventions to increase attraction in psychotherapy worked very nicely with middle-class students in the student counseling center I was running at Syracuse University. However, when we took these same interventions and studied them with low-income clients at the Veterans Administration and Community Mental Health Centers, most of these relationship-enhancing interventions didn't work. The discrepancy was dramatic and an example of a discrepancy that had been in the literature saying that a fair number of therapies seem to work reasonably well for insight-oriented middle class type clients, but in contrast, there is very little demonstrated effectiveness for low-income clients. Our ventures into the domain of social skills training sought to correct this deficiency.

SKILLSTREAMING

ADG: *In recent years, you've written extensively about social skills training, skillstreaming, and aggression replacement training. Is this an outgrowth of this prior research?*

AG: Yes. We sought to respond prescriptively to what developmental psychologists have said about the learning style of low-income folks. We did so with our book, *Structured Learning Therapy* [Goldstein, 1973], subtitled *Toward a Psychotherapy for the Poor*. The clients we worked with were low-income adults in public mental hospitals who were being sent out to the community with quite different community functioning skills because they'd been in the hospital so long. This began to sound more and more not like doing therapy but doing training or teaching. When we finished I wanted to extend this strategy to low-income adolescents and children. That's what I've been doing for the last 15 to 20 years and now it's in hundreds of schools and delinquency centers. I just finished revising the first skillstreaming book with a 75-page research bibliography, so the studies have been substantial.

ADG: *What is there about skillstreaming that seems to make a difference?*

AG: Basically I came to view the chronically aggressive youngsters who I was seeing in delinquency centers and schools as youngsters who were bored, well trained in being antisocial from early in life and who, when frustrated or seeing things as hostility directed toward them, responded with the limited alternatives available in their bag of tricks. We wanted to expand their bag of tricks by giving them choices that were prosocial alternatives to their usual antisocial behavior. When working with kids I often use the analogy of the football quarterback who uses the same play on every down. Before two or three plays unfold he's getting creamed by the defense. Different situations, different plays. It doesn't mean that they're never going to hit someone again, but sometimes they can negotiate, sometimes they can walk away, sometimes they do something else. So we teach these alternatives, and as a group we try to help youngsters understand which alternatives fit. We then overpractice it so that it becomes more prepotent [more likely to occur] in their response hierarchies because, in general, when someone gets in their face they smack someone within a millisecond. We'd like the other responses to become somewhat more likely. We also try to arrange the system, parents, peers and others so that the system rewards the positive not the negative behaviors, because the skills don't make sense unless someone responds positively when you do them.

Skillstreaming grew into Aggression Replacement Training, which grew into the Prepare Curriculum, but all three of these interventions are simply expressions of my belief that one important role for the change agent, the counselor, or school psychologist is as psychoeducator, a trainer. This doesn't mean that skillstreaming is the whole therapy, or the only therapy necessary for any particular kid, or the single

best therapy. But for many kids it needs to be part of the package. So I very much see myself as a trainer working with trainees, and my move in my own career from a psychology department in a college of liberal arts to special education, and now a counseling section in a college of education is totally compatible with what I'm continuing to do.

ADG: *Many of our students see themselves as counselors working in an office helping people by talking with them. However, you're suggesting that they may be equally, if not more effective as trainers. Could you expand on your view of counselors as trainers?*

AG: As far as I'm concerned, almost every therapy is good for somebody and no therapy is good for everybody. So if someone comes to you and their concerns are existential questions such as "Who am I," and "What's the purpose and meaning in my life," exploratory, existentially based, psychodynamic counseling may be the treatment of choice. However, when someone comes to you because they've been fighting a lot, or they're having difficulty in keeping a job, or they're getting kicked out of school, it's not so much existential exploration that they need, it's behavioral alternatives. Half the reason that they behave aggressively in the first place is not just impulsiveness and qualities like that, it's that they don't have choices, they don't have a repertoire, they don't know what to do instead. There's no magic in the skills-training approaches. Lots of times they still recidivate, they still act aggressively, but at least a substantial minority of the time, if you give them choices and try to help them sort of come up with the choices themselves, they will be motivated to use them.

ADG: *What have you learned from this research?*

AG: I would say that the main theme of our research all these years has not been on whether people learn the skills, but whether they will use them in the real world of their parents, their peers, their schools, and so forth. As far as I'm concerned, the single most important topic in intervention work is generalization. It's not difficult, given all you have going for you, to change someone's behavior in the consulting room. But these are often people who come from environments that are hostile to prosocial behaviors. You're swimming upstream in a muddy river. So the main conclusion of our research with skills-training methods is that if you want to change that very-difficult-to-change behavior called aggression-difficult to change because it's taught and rewarded so well in our society-you have to do two things. You have to direct powerful interventions toward the perpetrators of the aggression and equally powerful interventions to the people who hold in their hands the destiny of what you've taught the client. So when we work with delinquent kids we try very hard to pull in the family. When we work with gang youth, we train the gang as a unit. Nothing new here, the systems idea has been around for decades, but to say it and do it, especially with hard to reach folks, are two different things.

AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE

ADG: *Much of your research and writing over the last decade has focused on issues of violence and aggression in society generally and in our schools in particular. What do you see happening in society that has given rise to the increase in violence?*

AG: It's always hard to know how to interpret social statistics. My take on it is that there is both more violence and more reporting of violence, so that some of the level of violence that we perceive is our preoccupation with whatever violence goes on. The basic undercurrent for both why violence happens and how to change it is, as far as I'm concerned, something that the social learning people have written about. I think aggression is primarily learned behavior that is learned in relatively few venues. The first place it's learned is in the home where you have a lot of coercive, absent, or inadequate parenting. That's no great insight, but it's partly an answer to your question because I think people are doing, in general, a less good job at being parents. One implication is that it would be a good idea to have mandatory courses in parenting for all our children about the time they can become parents, which is about age 11. A second venue is the school, and I particularly point to the 23 states that permit corporal punishment. Kids see the lesson that "might makes right" being played out. The third venue, and I think the most potent one, is the mass media. Forty years ago we didn't have the incredible diet now spoken to by over a thousand studies of television violence and its consequences for copycat violence, for desensitization, and for increased fearfulness. I like to answer questions like the one you pose by saying to the questioner: "You be a 10-yearold. Imagine being on the receiving end of corporal punishment at home and school, or learning about sexuality for the first time as an aggressive act, as you see it on much of television. How would you behave?" The answer is that the norm in society about aggression has changed.

ADG: *You do workshops on violence and aggression in many other countries. Are the issues the same worldwide?*

AG: Yes. However the countries I've been to in the last few years—Sweden, Norway, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand, even England—all are, in a good sense, a dozen or so years behind the United States. Their violence levels are high, but not when compared with what's going on here. There are opportunities in these countries to be proactive and preventive that, I fear, we may either have lost or are much harder to capture here.

ADG: *What do you tell them?*

AG: I say, I know you're distressed by these violence levels, but I want to show you what's going on in parts of the United States to scare you a bit, because if you do nothing, 15 years from now this is where you are going to be. But if you catch it low [early], it will be easier to manage later.

ADG: *Have we lost our opportunity to turn things around?*

AG: In my own work in the states, I put at least as much emphasis on cursing, bullying, harassment, and vandalism

as I do on assaults and serious crimes. Again, following a simple learning model, if I engage in these low levels of violence and nothing happens to me, then I'm not only going to keep doing it, I'll escalate it. So I'm very much in favor of zero tolerance policies, although sometimes I think the punishments are too severe. The idea is to catch it low.

The other thing about all these foreign trips is that on a personal basis it's a lovely opportunity for me to see the world and meet people and develop collegial relationships in different countries.

BEING PRODUCTIVE

ADG: *In the last decade you've written over 40 books, numerous articles and given workshops nationally and internationally while maintaining a full teaching load and raising a family. How have you been able to accomplish so much?*

AG: I think there are several answers to that and they all combine to the grand answer that I enjoy what I'm doing. I care about it, and I care about the kids I study. I want to make an imprint and impact on their lives and on our field. That's one part of the motivation. The other is that, early on, I was able to learn that it's helpful if you can patch the different demands of your career together around a common theme. I teach courses in the delinquency area, I've run a counseling center, I read the research literature on those topics, and that's what I study. So the different things I do fit together and feed on each other. It's also been helpful that I've been married to two lovely women, one deceased, one my current wife, who've been helping me do my thing. So this is my way of saying that being productive is a combination of things within oneself and within one's environment. I also live in Syracuse, New York where there isn't much else to do so much of the year.

ADG: *Many faculty who write seem to do so to achieve tenure. It's clear that's not been a motive for your writing, so is there something else?*

AG: Yes, there's the feeling that I have something to say, although some may feel I've long said it. My first two jobs, one at Pittsburgh Medical School and the other in the Veterans Administration, were research jobs. Although I've been at Syracuse University for 30-odd years I was never really interested in becoming an academic. My self-concept is much more of a researcher-practitioner than professor. The professor part has sort of paid the ticket. But teaching has not been number one on my list. It's been a vehicle for me to do these other things. In some ways I see myself as a writer who happens to be in an academic setting. I also enjoy writing as you know, with a pen and pad.

ADG: *I know. You're one of very few people I know who still writes with a pen and not a computer.*

AG: I think of the writing process, whether it's with a pen or a computer, as a thinking process. I will say that when I am working on a project, which is usually, I spend a great deal of time writing it in my head. By the time I put it

on paper, it's into a few drafts already, and I don't often make changes. I understand how computers work: you plug them in, press a start button and then you do other things. But I really am not computer literate. Now on the other hand, I'm surrounded by people who are computer literate. I probably will go over the wall regarding computer use one of these days, but my working style with pen and pad has worked for me. On the other hand, I will at some point go over the wall because my 8-year-old and 3-year old granddaughters want to communicate with me on email. Now there's motivation.

GRADUATE EDUCATION

ADG: You've been a faculty member for 34 years. As you look back on your career, what are your thoughts on graduate education in our field?

AG: I think the most important thing people can learn in graduate school is an attitude that says I not only will accept changes in knowledge and procedures in my field but I will welcome such change and contribute to it. Unfortunately we all have trouble with ambiguity and need closure, especially if we're going to engage in counseling practice. We need a method and a theory. So you often get students going through graduate programs who have a viewpoint: work hard, learn it well, get rewarded for learning it well, and go out and practice it. Then you meet them 5, 10, 15, 20 years later and they're doing the same thing-what some of us have called a "hardening of the categories." So I think the main thing in graduate school is the opportunity not only to learn the state of the art, but also to learn to welcome openness to change. That attitude has to be communicated by faculty who say that state of the art may be fine for today, but for tomorrow it's probably a little less good, and so on and so forth, as knowledge accumulates.

The other thing I think of when I think about graduate school has to do with how broadly students will read and study, and this also is largely a function of what the faculty does. I still believe that you come into graduate school and the best thing you can do if you are interested in topic A, is to stay away from topic A for a year or two, because there are 17 other topics that you haven't learned about in your undergraduate years. Unfortunately, there's so much pressure on students to declare, to specialize, to become an expert, that we often wind up training narrow experts who are very good in a segmented domain but whose knowledge of the domain is greatly damaged by the fact that they not only don't know what surrounds it broadly; they don't even know what surrounds it immediately.

ADG: What do you see giving rise to the pressures to specialize?

AG: The information explosion these decades is such that it's much harder for students to read broadly. It's partly the great demand for services, and it's partly that faculty themselves are very often like that. Now there's a price you pay. I've read broadly and have really enjoyed it, but when I sit

down and try to integrate field A, which I know very well, and field B, in which I'm not an expert, I've taken it on the chin now and then from people in field B saying "well this is okay, but it's really not quite on the mark." I've had that from social psychologists and in more recent times from environmental criminologists.

ADG: How have you managed to avoid "hardening of the categories?"

AG: The answer is to have good collaborators. I've been fortunate over the years in my research and my writing to have been able to locate and connect with people in sister fields.

ADG: Is that why several of your books and articles have been coauthored?

AG: That's right. And that's largely because each contributes her or his own expertise. Think of it as a good meal. You wouldn't want the pastry chef to prepare the chopped liver, but your grandmother has been making chopped liver for a long time. You understand, each contributes their specialty. The other part of that, quite frankly, is that I am also a social being and doing research and writing by oneself can be on the lonely side. It's nice to have collaborators in the social-professional sense of people to interact with, bounce ideas with, challenge, respond to challenges, so forth.

ADG: We seem to be preparing people in isolation, yet you're suggesting that we have to work together. However, I also see faculty who are frightened of collaboration because of the tenure promotion process.

AG: The tenure promotion process affects peoples' behavior as academics, and there are analogous things that affect collaborative desires or reluctance out in that real world. A lot of it has to do with the pressures associated with the way care is managed these days. I guess my best advice to the academic or the practitioner is to tell them to relax. Every time you give in life you get, and the product of joint efforts will be better because it's from various perspectives. I understand turf issues, and I think that's been a rather sad inclination in academia in recent years. When a student says, "I better not share this idea because someone may steal it," well, where did the student learn that? What's the academic climate? I've heard that happening at universities and it seems to me the very heart of the university is an open exchange of information. So a lot of it falls on the back of faculty models. How open are we? It really reiterates that the main thing you learn in graduate school is not so much theories or research or methodologies, but attitudes, attitudes toward data and attitudes toward our field.

LOOKING AHEAD

ADG: As you're about to retire, where do you see our field going and what changes do you see in the way we will prepare counselors for the twenty-first century.

AG: I have some views that have been with me for a long

time, and they're kind of evolutionary rather than revolutionary. One is that we do not place enough emphasis in our training and our research on the qualities that change approaches have in common. That's consistent with Jerry Frank's notion in *Persuasion and Healing* that I mentioned earlier. I have felt that much of what helps clients change and what we need to focus on in our training and research are the things that approaches have in common: relationship, empathy, dependency, suggestibility, expectancy, and so forth.

The second part is that we have to do a better job of matching clients and counselors and a better ethical job of acknowledging who we're not good at helping and who we are good at helping. That doesn't mean that there aren't specific features of different counseling and therapy approaches that are relevant to outcome. In my work, the specific feature has to do with the skill repertoire. I have no presumption that that's all the person needs or that it can be delivered in an impersonal way. When I go into a delinquency center the first things I look at before we get into anything is how well run is this place. Is it safe? What's the relationship between the staff and the kids? Because that's the foundation on which any specific approaches are based. So I continue to hold those views I've had for a long time and hope that the dual focus on both the commonalities and specifics will continue.

ADG: What would you do to transform the preparation of school counselors?

AG: I think adequate preparation is a combination of good understanding of what came before, and that means reading. For example, counselors working in urban settings ought not only read about what the counseling literature has to say, but read other literature. In this case we're talking about sociology, social welfare work, certain aspects of psychology and, who knows, even economics, so you get a broad-based understanding. I'd also urge that it be learning not just from other academics but from the customer. One of the strengths of the program that you and I are in right now is that there's ample opportunity for real-world practicum experience. And experience not only in the sense of being out there and being supervised by someone here, but being supervised by people out there, as well as ample opportunity to talk to clients and try to understand the world as they understand it. So I think it's this combination of book learning and applied learning that sets people on the right course whether it's in an urban or any other setting.

ADG: You've mentored many students. What have you learned from them?

AG: I guess I've learned half of what I know from my interactions with students. You know I've taught graduate courses primarily and yet I never gave an exam, not once in my career, and I very rarely gave a lecture. In a typical graduate class I'd have the students submit questions, not answers but questions on the week's readings. Then I'd pick out a certain number of questions and I'd read them aloud,

and I'd say here's question six. What do we think of this? Here's what I think, what do you think? So in that exchange of views and knowledge, I've had my opportunity via thousands of minilectures, to share what I know and what I think, but also to learn from many hundreds of graduate students over the years. It seems to me that's been a very nice way to not only communicate and learn but to introduce graduate students to the idea of open collegiality.

ADG: That sounds ideal, and yet many of our colleagues would ask how you do that in a large class?

AG: I have, for the most part, stayed with that model even in a large group. I've had to be more selective and representative in which questions I selected to discuss, but it's always been an opportunity to share an attitude, to say to the student you could speak out loud because I'm going to respect what you think. I never forget the model that Carl Rogers put forth. He would go into an auditorium where there were 3,000 people. How do you communicate responsively in a lecture with 3,000 people? When the people would come into the room he gave them three 5 X 8 cards: a red one, a green one, and a white one. In his opening statement Rogers said, "Look, I'm going to talk about this general domain, if what I'm talking about is something that you're interested in and the way I'm going about it sounds OK to you, hold up the white card. If you're bored and you know it already and you'd like me to stop talking about that topic, hold up the red card. And if I seem to be winding down on a topic but you want to hear more about it, hold up the green card." So he'd be talking away and there would be a flash of cards. So I guess whether it's 40 or 4,000 there are ways that you can be responsive to an audience and at the same time be respectful of them.

ADG: It seems to reflect a point of view. If you go in with the belief that you want to hear what people are saying, you'll find some way of doing it. When the belief is that I need to impart my wisdom to people, then it doesn't make any difference whether there are 8 people or 800 people, some way you'll do the same thing.

AG: On the other hand, if they all keep holding up red cards it's time to think about getting a day job.

ADG: What message would you like to leave your students?

AG: I think an overriding theme, although it may sound cliché, is the notion of "follow your bliss." Doing work as a practitioner or a researcher and doing it well can be arduous, time-consuming, and sometimes difficult. However, much of that difficulty will fade if one is studying issues that one really cares about. I think I would say to the academic how important it is that doctoral students be encouraged to choose research topics of their interests, so that the dissertation is the beginning, not the end, of their research. And that is the same thing for the practitioner in terms of learning different therapies and doing different counseling approaches and so forth. Much of the issue of work satisfaction, growth in one's career, and contribution

to the field fades away if one is excited about what one is doing. There are certainly answers out there in terms of what we know about counseling and psychology, but there are an incredible number of questions, so there's much to learn and much to study if one picks something that excites oneself and goes with it.

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