

Stepping into Someone Else's Shoes

Sally Openshaw

Presidential Acceptance Speech

17 June 2023

International Integrative Psychotherapy Association (IIPA)

11th Professional Education Conference, Bilbao, Spain, 15th-17th June 2023

"Presence and Involvement: The Healing Dimensions of Psychotherapy"

Abstract

This article provides an adapted transcript of the Presidential acceptance speech made in 2023 at the IIPA Conference. The speech considers the role of AI in therapy and references how IIPA is represented currently with ChatGPT. A request is made for all members of the audience to go onto this platform and re-educate the current material that is presented there, which is incorrect and is not representative of how we see ourselves.

Keywords

Integrative psychotherapy, ChatGPT, artificial intelligence, philosophy, the keyhole, chatbots

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed members of the International Integrative Psychotherapy Association, distinguished guests, and fellow colleagues: this is a speech of two halves, possibly working together, like a right and a left shoe.

I stand before you today with immense gratitude and humility as I accept the honour of becoming the new President of this organization. It is a privilege to be entrusted with this responsibility, and I would like to begin by expressing my heartfelt appreciation to our outgoing President, whose tireless dedication and leadership have set a high standard for us all. Today, as I embark on this new journey, I would like to reflect on the significance of "stepping into somebody else's shoes."

When we think about the metaphor of stepping into someone else's shoes, we are reminded of the importance of empathy, understanding, and continuity. Our outgoing President, whose shoes I am now filling, has left behind a legacy of integrity and commitment. They have devoted countless hours to advancing the work of the board, promoting collaboration, and nurturing a sense of community among our members. Their shoes are not just filled with accomplishments, but also with the wisdom gained through experience and the passion for helping others.

As I prepare to step into these shoes, I recognize the weight of the responsibility that comes with this role. It is not a position to be taken lightly, but rather an opportunity to serve our Association, our members, and the clients we aim to help. I pledge to honor the footsteps of my predecessor by upholding the values that have guided us and by forging ahead with renewed enthusiasm and fresh perspectives.

In my journey to this position, I have had the privilege of witnessing the transformative power of integrative psychotherapy. I have seen how this approach can help individuals explore the depths of their being, integrate their past experiences, and discover a more authentic and fulfilling way of living. I firmly believe that this approach creates rich healing and growth.

However, as I step into these shoes, I also recognize the need for adaptation and evolution. The field of psychotherapy is constantly evolving, and we must be responsive to the changing needs of our clients and the wider society. It is my intention to foster an environment

that encourages innovation, research, and the integration of new ideas, while also respecting and preserving the foundational principles that underpin our practice.

As I embark on this new chapter, I am acutely aware that I do not do so alone. Our Association is comprised of talented and dedicated professionals from around the globe who bring their unique perspectives, experiences, and expertise to the table. It is through collaboration and shared knowledge that we can truly make a difference. I want to continue to foster a culture of inclusivity, open dialogue, and collaboration within our Association, allowing us to learn from one another and collectively advance the field of integrative psychotherapy.

Furthermore, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our members. It is your dedication, passion, and unwavering commitment to your clients and the field of psychotherapy that makes this Association thrive. I encourage you to continue to contribute your valuable insights and experiences, and to actively engage in the various opportunities and initiatives that our association provides. Your contributions are vital in shaping the future of integrative psychotherapy.

Thank you and may we all embark on this journey with hope, dedication, and a shared commitment to making a positive impact.

Ok, let us pause and take a moment to notice how it has been listening to me so far. Tell the person next to you: what have you noticed? What are you aware of?

Last week I was with my daughter, and she was asking me if I was ready for the conference. I explained that I had not completed my speech for accepting the Presidency. Her eyes lit up as she said, “let us see what ChatGPT would say.”

This speech so far has been created by my stepping into the shoes of ChatGPT, artificial intelligence (AI).

Now you have Sally talking, not AI. This was not a lazy gesture on my part but rather one of curiosity. I typed in the title words “Stepping into someone else’s shoes,” IIPA President acceptance speech, ten minutes. Within about two seconds, the speech that I have just delivered appeared before me. I find that both intriguing and terrifying.

AI (such as ChatGPT) provides human-like responses to questions it is asked. The free app was launched on 30th November 2022, and by 4th December it had over a million users. No other internet platform had achieved this level of public engagement so fast. By January 2023 there were over 100 million users (WiserNotify, 2025).

What is important about this technology is that it is programmed with vast amount of knowledge and information, but also, as its name suggests, it is a generative pretrained transformer. This means it can have an ability to think and provide rationality and arguments. This is a step change in technology. It has ability to reason, produce sentiment, and make its own decisions. It has the capacity to retrain itself and develop as it is used, so it is evolving day-by-day.

So, as I look back at the speech it wrote, what I noticed about the AI contribution is the words were there in rather formal lines, but there was no soul behind them, no full engagement. The involvement with any audience was absent, and even if I stay present as the speaker, there is a wooden feel to the presentation and a lack of warmth. It is human-like but not human. This was noticed by some of you too.

AI is here to stay. It is the cornerstone of the upcoming digital revolution, and it has such capability in some areas. Baker (2024) believes it will be part of our future as therapists. AI claims that it cannot replace human relationships because, mainly, humans will not make strong emotional connections with the machines, but my own work suggests otherwise. Many individuals spend hours connecting with their phones, and the internet is often the third party in many relationship conflicts that I see in my therapy space, as it has a profound impact on intimacy and relationship contact.

However, compared to a human therapist, AI is cheaper (free for basic usage), removes barriers around access, is available 24/7 and it is in most people’s pockets. It is excellent (faster than humans) at picking up patterns and trends so is said to reduce the impact of trial and error of therapy. Criticism shows it can also get things wrong. It has been designed

using historical data, so that means prejudice taken from history may be repeated in output given today. Bad data in will perpetuate as bad data out.

The evolving world of AI matters to us all. Chatbots (conversational artificial intelligence, or CIA) imitate conversations with humans and are already there to help people with mental health distress. WYSA, Woebot, and Youper are noted by Baker (2024, p. 24) as having limited human oversight. Limbic, Rise Up, Mind Spa, and JoBot (for people living with autism) are also popular alternatives offering help by chatbots. Some of these have been designed to be more feeling orientated, and all are responsive to what has been typed by the user.

Whilst they can provide simulated empathy, none of these can safely resolve a life-threatening situation such as suicide or domestic violence. Many of their SOS features can recognise paths of escalation but then need to refer the user back to a real person. I do not want to become an emergency service to pick up the crisis that AI cannot solve.

We cannot afford to let our precious therapy be delivered by AI. We need to take action to bring the humanness of what we do to the forefront of our online description and talk about the power of relational presence. We need to be involved in promoting all the things AI cannot do, including our ability to think outside the box, our strong personal involvement, our ability to notice social variability, and our prevention of social prejudice. We need to strive to continue to improve our evidence base of the impact of our relational therapy.

The shoes of integrative therapy are known to me, well-worn and familiar. As I look at the integrative therapy data already contained within AI, I notice some inaccuracies. It describes integrative therapy as a collection of different therapeutic modalities. This does not adequately describe how an integrated philosophy, theory, and methods were considered, in the context of relationship, in the model created by Erskine, Moursund, and Trautmann in *Beyond Empathy* in 1999.

When I pushed AI to talk about integrative therapy and linked it to the name Richard Erskine, it was unable to find our philosophical principals as outlined by Erskine (2013), and there was no mention of non-pathologizing. I pushed it to talk with me about the keyhole. To my horror it represented the keyhole with essential words altered and changed. The three main skills it named were attunement, involvement, and inclusion (not inquiry). The latter use of “inclusion” is incorrect for all images of the keyhole model presented by the founders Erskine, Moursund, and Trautmann (1999, pp. 156–175) and taught in the IP curriculum and psychotherapy schools.

It got worse as I dived even deeper. The eight relational needs were presented with the following new titles: inclusion, control, affection, self-esteem, orientation and direction, trust, intimacy, and identity, completely missing the nuances of meaning embedded in the original eight needs identified by Erskine, Moursund, and Trautmann (1999, pp. 121–155) and reinforced in articles by Eastop (2021) and Birkebaek (2024) more recently.

I need your help. Each and every one of us needs to take simple action to correct the information already embedded in this AI. As Molden (2024) suggests, we need to opt in to AI to expand its knowledge, to correct and inform, and to help it learn so it does not threaten our image and principles.

In conclusion, let me offer a more typical relational appreciation of you all. Carol, our past President, has brought music into our lives on the Board. She has the valuable skill of gathering things up, never losing sight of unresolved items, and bringing them back for attention. She looks out for the underdog and is always making a point to represent those less fortunate. Her humaneness has been inspiring. Her warmth has been contagious, and she has been a delight to work alongside.

To you, our members, I want to clarify that the Board met before this conference. We completed an in-depth review of our Association to prize what was working well and to expand attention to weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. We have an important intention to increase the connection between us, as Board representatives, and you, the members of IIPA. We want to make our work more transparent and build greater dialogue between us.

We also want to build more member-to-member connectivity. We plan to provide more resources to create communication between us, build more webinars, and create a working

party to look into continuous professional development opportunities. This will include giving more attention to our blog, creating our next shared conference for 2025, and enhancing our important journal by encouraging you to write and spread the word about what we do (so AI will pick it up).

To the Board, I wanted to say thank you for the last year and the support you have offered. When I am with you, it is like wearing my comfortable slippers. Your warmth, familiarity, and relaxed fit is always very supportive. I know I am not walking alone as I take on this new role as President; people are there to steady me, walk alongside, and encourage more steps to be taken.

So, my take home message to you all is we have something precious, very precious, and we can be secure to become more outwards facing and tell others why relational, developmental-focused, integrative psychotherapy is vital in this changing world. We need your help to do this: to promote the unique humanness of what we do as an organization and in the relationships, face-to-face, with our clients. We need you to sing and emphasize the power of our presence and involvement in relational healing.

Sally Openshaw is a psychosexual and relationship therapist. She trained in Integrative Psychotherapy and finds working developmentally and relationally is vital when exploring sexuality and relationships. She specializes in working with people who have experienced sexual trauma. She is an IIPA Certified International Integrative Psychotherapy Trainer and Supervisor and works nationally and internationally. She is currently President of the International Integrative Psychotherapy Association.

References

- Associated Press. (2003, December 27). 2003 was the year AI went mainstream. It was also the year we started to panic about it. *Euronews*.
<https://www.euronews.com/next/2023/12/27/2023-was-the-year-ai-went-mainstream-it-was-also-the-year-we-started-to-panic-about-it>
- Baker, D. (2024). "The future is AI." *New Psychotherapist*, 87(Autumn), 23–29.
https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/media/dz3fbkfv/87_new-psychotherapist-autumn-2024_web.pdf
- Birkebaek, R. (2024). The journey from shame to self-agency. *International Journal of Integrative Psychotherapy*, 15, 37–42.
- Eastop, D. (2021). Schzoid phenomena and relational needs. *International Journal of Integrative Psychotherapy*, 12, 89–113.
- Erskine, R. G. (2011). Attachment, relational needs, and psychotherapeutic presence. *International Journal of Integrative Psychotherapy*, 2(1), 10–18
- Erskine R. G. (2013). Vulnerability, authenticity, and inter-subjective contact: Philosophical principals of integrative psychotherapy. *International Journal of Integrative Psychotherapy*, 4(2), 1–9.
- Erskine R. G., Moursund, J. P., & Trautmann, R. L. (1999). *Beyond empathy: A theory of contact-in-relationship*. Routledge.

Molden, H. (2024). "AI, automation and psychotherapy: A proposed model for the losses and gains in the automated therapeutic encounter. *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling*, 26(1), 48–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642537.2024.2318628>

WiserNotify. (2025). The latest ChatGPT statistics and user trends (2022–2025). Accessed 25 February. <https://wisernotify.com/blog/chatgpt-users/>