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Opening the psychological black box in genetic counseling

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Curriculum vitae

Joël Vos was born on the 2nd of April 1980 in Rotterdam. Already as a young child, he was interested in the different ways how people live their lives and how they cope with stressful life events. He especially liked reflecting on it, and writing about it; the story goes that even before he was formally able to write, he 'wrote' his first book, be it with his own invented letters. After having finished the secondary school 'De Lage Waard' in Papendrecht in 1998 (VWO), he discovered that his interests were optimally realized by studying psychology and philosophy.

From 1998 onwards, Joël followed all courses of 'Clinical and Health Psychology', 'Philosophy of Social Sciences' and 'Cognitive-Neuro Psychology (previously: Theoretical Psychology)' at the Leiden University. In 2004, he graduated cum laude in his psychology master, and in 2005 cum laude in his philosophy master. His interests were reflected in his selection of courses on existentialism, which focused on the way how people design and live their lives. Both his master theses were about the existential impact of immigration on the lives of immigrants, because he felt that most previous scientific studies focused too much on external aspects of immigration; i.e. the psychological black-box of immigrants had still to be opened. His philosophy thesis was rewarded with the Leo Polak Prize 2006 for the best thesis in the Netherlands about the humanization of society. Joël writes frequently about societal themes, and several of his essays were published in national newspapers. His essays have been awarded, for instance by the Serge Heederik Award for the best philosophy essay, which was about the psychological impact of 9-11 on society.

Joël continued realizing his interests by performing the studies described in this thesis at the department of Clinical Genetics in the Leiden University Medical Center (2005-2010). The Dutch Cancer Society financially enabled him and his team of fellow-researchers to do this research. In this period, he was also a part-time teacher at the Centre for Child and Family Studies of the Leiden University, followed several courses in statistics, and was (co)researcher in scientific studies, e.g. on religion/meaning-making in students and on the effects of contextual psychotherapy.

He is not only interested in theoretically studying how people live their lives, but he also wants to actually counsel people. For that reason, he has been trained in existential, contextual, cognitive-behavioral and group psychotherapy. In the past, he treated patients at the Psychomedical Center Parnassia in The Hague, performed psychological assessments with clients at the NOA Foundation Amsterdam, wrote personality reports and gave existential counseling for his clients in his private psychology practice. For instance, he has developed a meaning-centered group psychotherapy for students 'to learn how to make decisions, to live life more fully'. His international interests were reflected in his involvement in several developmental projects abroad; among other things he worked with Birmese political refugees in Thailand, and initiated/coordinated a school project in Ghana. He is board member of COME, Communications in the Middle East, which organizes dialogue seminars between young Israeli and Palestinian people.

One of the findings of his studies, described in this thesis, is that existential processes may play an important role in the lives of cancer patients. In addition, other studies have indicated that many cancer patients would like to receive professional help to find ways to live their lives meaningfully, despite their physical limitations and uncertainties of having cancer. However, there are few effective psychotherapies that explicitly help cancer patients with their existential questions. For that reason, Joël is now coordinating a study on the development, implementation and testing of meaning-centered group psychotherapy for cancer-patients, based on the works of Frankl and Breitbart. He has received a grant from the Dutch Cancer Society / Alpe d'Huzes for doing this research together with fellow-researchers at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Joël also supervises other studies on existential psychotherapy, also in cooperation with universities abroad.

Scientific publications & recent submissions

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