

Pilates for Family Therapists: Strengthening the Core

'The intrapsychic is not "a thread" in attachment theory but its core.' Crawley and Grant have my riveted attention. I devour all the articles. The theme is couples: we are in the territory of attachment and the intrapsychic.

Lê Hoang writes of inviting her couple clients to take 'leave of absence' from their current difficulties and participate in autobiography in the presence of the other. While she does not develop commentary about attachment theory in the way that Crawley and Grant do, her Bowenian position is not unlike theirs: that an empathic understanding of each other's past formative experiences gives productive depth to any relationship work based in the here and now. Following the autobiographical sessions, she

see[s] differentiation evidenced in the way each partner focuses less on blaming or criticising the other ... they face more about themselves and wonder what it was about *them* that has led them to feel and act the way they do.

She has found a way to tackle the first of Gottman's 'four horsemen of the apocalypse' (Gottman, 2000).

Michael Madden had noticed that 'stalemates in relationships were usually characterised by a conversational stalemate'. Acknowledging stimulus from Karl Tomm's view that 'many questions do have therapeutic effects on family members (directly) through the implications of the question and/or (indirectly) through the verbal responses of family members to them', Madden offers a highly refreshing description of his own movement from 'a more ordered and sequential exploration of a couple's relationship problems to a more free floating question and answer session'. Reaching by this means fresh, untrampled territory in his conversation with couples, he began 'to devise questions that invite couples to connect with the thinking behind their thinking and to have a relationship conversation without blame and despair'. Madden structures the rest of his absorbing article around five questions he has found it productive to ask — another way of tackling the first horseman.

Dattilio, on the other hand, emphasises cognitive restructuring as a critical component in couples therapy. Pointing out that systems and cognitive behavioural perspectives share 'an emphasis on multidirectional, reciprocal influence', he contrasts the reframing, reflective approach of the former with the more directive approach of the latter with its focus on restructuring the core beliefs or 'schemas' which shape people's perceptions of their experiences.

In a stimulating exchange of viewpoints, Michelle Webster comments on Dattilio's assertion that 'some theorists, such as emotionally focused therapy ... do not believe that intellectual understanding is important' and that 'gaining insight into how

cognitions influence the problem is an important treatment component'. Webster asks the question, 'While it may be the couple's perceptions that are problematic, is it not the couple's ability to talk together that makes the difference?'

Insight, however gained, is surely the goal of much of our therapy, whether approached primarily through the intellect or the emotions. Insight on the part of therapists themselves is a fundamental requirement for Doug Sotheren. His 'becoming present to another person or to a relationship' and 'trust[ing] the process enough to allow change to happen' relies on it. 'That's the whole issue of the counsellor or the therapist's presence being the key thing, *the way you are is healing.*'

Pondering this statement led me to reread Hugh Crago's bold article on selection of therapists for training and to reflect once again on Judy Hildebrand's book in which she explores the necessary links between personal and professional development in the training of therapists. While neither they nor Sotheren use the term 'insight' in their arguments, it strikes me that insight on the part of the trainee is in large measure what they seek to ascertain and/or develop.

And this in turn takes me back to Lê Hoang who writes of preparing clients to look at 'you now' as contrasted with 'little you'. This reflects her interpretation of Bowen's concept of self-differentiation which, she states, 'suits [her] belief that one experiences deep and meaningful relationships when one goes deeply into oneself'.

While there is nothing Bowenian in the social constructionist approach taken by van Schalkwyk in her explorations of four women's search for identity and a 'relational self' following on divorce, I am struck, in the present context, that part of the women's task could be described as one of differentiating herself from the married woman each saw herself as, and believed she was seen as, previously.

Family therapists will always be interested in patterns. In this context, I introduce another writer (not featured in our journal), Bruno Hildenbrand, who presents a view on genogram work which may be seen as controversial. Essentially, he maintains (and illustrates in a fascinating three-generation genogram) the importance of not relegating the genogram to the status of a mere instrument or technique. He also insists that structure and process in genogram work should be indivisible. He acknowledges the work of McGoldrick and Gerson (1990) as a healthy counterbalance to tendencies to reconstruct relationship patterns by focusing on the here and now through circular questioning and paradoxical interventions or to declare the past and present irrelevant in favour of the future, as he sees solution-focused therapy doing.

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Hildenbrand then takes McGoldrick's work further, not merely noting the evident patterns over generations of family events and linking these to the participants' commentary, but hypothesising alternative courses of action at each decision-point and analysing these sequentially in their personal and historical context. Only after this examination would he involve the current generation in a discussion of the patterns and their meaning, 'reconstructing a process of continuous life-decisions from within', seeing them as 'a dynamic interactive field'. In this refusal to separate structure and process, he seeks to 'take into account the authenticity of human existence'.

He sees his sequential analysis as equally useful for research and therapy. His advice is not to get data schematically but to leave room for stories, work with those that are initially forthcoming from what is remembered and know that this will prompt further remembrances. He makes the point that one should never underestimate the value of everyday knowledge such as one might gain from reading a good newspaper. Also that one must differentiate the impact on decision-making of non-normative life experiences from those decisions that are made at times of normal developmental crisis. Working in this way with his genogram subjects, he has found that as the potential for change is discovered, so a softening of the past occurs: what was previously not understood becomes affec-

tively connected with the past. And we are, by another route, in the territory of attachment and insight again.

In concluding these editorial remarks, I adopt some words from a review in this issue by Sarah Jones where she refers to 'the genuine authentic voice of the text ... which manages to speak of the suffering of the human condition without theoretical obfuscation'. This many of our contributors have also managed to do.

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References

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Award

Award for Distinguished Service to Family Therapy in Australia and New Zealand

At the 25th Family Therapy Conference in Brisbane in 2004, the Award for Distinguished Service to Family Therapy in Australia and New Zealand was presented to QAFT, our second largest state association. After the award is given at each conference, we usually hear no more about it. This year, the euphoria about the award became part of QAFT's high after a successfully run conference, and Ross Adams wrote in 'President's Desk' in their November newsletter:

Another positive outcome of the conference was QAFT receiving the Australian Family Therapy Award from the board of the journal for outstanding contributions to family therapy within Australia ... to acknowledge the great work QAFT members have done over the past 25 years.

Family Therapy members from other states have complained about

their tiredness following the organising of a conference. My experience, so far, within the QAFT committee is the opposite. We are keen to maintain momentum ...

An occasional honour, the 25th Anniversary Award, was made at the Conference, to Malcolm Robinson, for 25 years of service, starting with his role in the delivery of the first issue in Adelaide. He laboured from 1980 to 1988 on the Board of Assessors (originally named the Advisory Board); on the Journal Board from 1988 to 1992, and as Treasurer of the Journal Board from 1988 to 1991. Malcolm has given service also on the local level to TFTA, most recently as president, leading the team which organised the last Adelaide conference. Malcolm and his team made the most strenuous efforts to bring about reconciliation,

personally phoning people who were still involved with family therapy but had become estranged. It was Malcolm's vision to carry the reconciliation theme to the Indigenous population as well, and to involve the public in the conference in a series of seminars which ran parallel with the conference. Never has a conference organiser worked harder than Malcolm did in the attempt to realise his vision.

Malcolm has presented at many conferences and has continued true to the early spirit of family therapy in presenting his own work for scrutiny via videotape. He has written one paper for the journal, and the award gave him the necessary push to return to his computer to begin writing. However, it may be that Malcolm's years as trainer at Bower Place are what he is known best for. ©