

EDITORIAL

What am I?

Remember, those of you whose hair is greyer, the compositions we used to write in primary school: three paragraphs describing some object or animal, ending with the question 'What am I?' If we asked you all to do this exercise now, describing the *Journal*, we would get as many different answers as we have readers. There would be some commonalities, however.

Readers who teach at universities would probably begin by alluding to the international, refereed status of the *Journal*. 'Blind' refereeing (where each manuscript submitted for publication is read by at least two people of experience and stature in the profession, who do not know the author's identity) is an important way of ensuring that contributions reach an acceptable standard. Refereeing also means that contributors receive feedback from more than one source.

Family therapy practitioners often read the *Journal* mainly for articles that are practice-specific. Clinicians want to be confirmed in their practice, offered new strategies, and reminded of knowledge that their initial training neglected. They also want to keep up with what is happening nationally and internationally. It has been the *ANZJFT's* proud boast that practitioners do read it; so our *Journal* must balance their needs with the needs of academics, trainees and research students, and that is why we insist that theoretical and empirically-based contributions be readable and interesting, not just intellectually respectable. The achievement of that goal is the responsibility of both assessors and Editors, who must persuade authors that they can express their message in a way that will hold readers' attention, without any sacrifice of meaning or rigour.

John Levett, who ably edited *The Australian Library Journal* in the seventies, took up the editorial reins again recently after some years of absence, and wrote:

... the Journal's function of reflecting the profession back to its members could not be fully served if it were to concentrate only on a particular category of contribution from one section of its membership, and whatever else happens it must continue to encourage the submission of material from as wide a writership as possible (Levett, 1996: 9).

'Reflecting the profession back to its members' is what any good professional organ must do. It has been said before, but bears repeating, that in the absence of a national professional organisation for family therapists, our *Journal* must serve as a meeting place for family therapists in print, a reporting of professional activity across two countries, and a record of current issues and practices. 'Network News' is central to the fulfilment of

these functions. Recent changes in 'Network News' will we hope make the *Journal's* 'magazine' section more effective and coherent in the future. State and regional correspondents are now being encouraged to write at greater length, say once a year, on a particular local development that deserves a wider audience. Our 'Foreign Correspondents' bring us regular reports on what family therapists are talking about in the US, Britain and Europe. A Third World correspondent will, we hope, join us during 1998. Finally, the 'themed' section of 'Network News' is now presented as a single continuous essay, to avoid overlap between individual contributions, and to highlight common perceptions and pre-occupations.

John Levett continues:

... the Journal's coverage must be as broad as the interests of its readers ... all discussion is a form of contradiction, all debate an attempt to reconcile opposing points of view. No professional journal should insulate itself from this process (6).

Those are stirring words. Would you, reader, tolerate it if *all* the voices in Australian and New Zealand family therapy were to find expression in the pages of your *Journal*? It is certainly the view of your current Editors that the *ANZJFT* cannot fulfil its mission as long as any substantive position within Australian and New Zealand family therapy remains unrepresented within these pages.

Levett goes on to say that a professional journal 'has to be unafraid of giving offence' (6). Family therapists find it easy and gratifying to take stands as advocates for those we all agree are oppressed. But apart from this, our continual dealings with the frailty of the human ego seem to lead us to shy away from the possibility of giving offence to one another through robust criticism of currently fashionable approaches, or through robust advocacy for perspectives that are regarded as socially conservative or lacking in 'correct' moral values. How often, for example, do we confront the contradictions involved in working in a 'culturally appropriate manner' with a client group whose ethnicity or religious beliefs actually lead them to tolerate or even advocate practices that we enlightened souls regard as abhorrent?

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Reference

Levett, J., 1996. The Future of a Professional Journal: A Contribution to the Debate, *The Australian Library Journal*, February: 3-9.