

REFRAINS

Haley and Hildebrand on the Training of Family Therapists

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Jo Grimwade and Helen Pavlin were asked to conduct a correspondence about two books which both relate to the teaching of family therapy. There has been recent debate in Victorian family therapy circles about the relevance of family of origin exploration to family therapy trainees. Judy Hildebrand and Jay Haley have views on this topic, as Jo and Helen note. The nature of the books they are reading means that they find themselves caught in a parallel process and at times, are distracted from the writers' message by the way that message is delivered.

Jo Begins

Dear Helen,

Strange to begin correspondence with an unknown person of unknown background about two books whose authors have a career-long interest in a practice (family therapy training) which, in my case, is only part of what I do. I trust the judgment of the Editors in selecting books, method and persons. Although at times I seem to belong to the Groucho Marx club of family therapists.

I want this to be interactive as the title 'Refrains' suggests and the best way I can do this is to segment my reading and my commentary. I have now read just over a quarter of Haley and feel the urge to correspond—at least in part because I want to put out some impressions before I have read the lot and see if my early perceptions are open to challenge—especially as Haley has always wanted people to take risks.

I think I met Judy Hildebrand at the Tavistock in late 1996. But only briefly, she being part of the Child and Family Department the members of which, on the whole, were not much interested in talking with me, as I was located in the Object Relations dominated Adolescent Department. I have only briefly looked at her book yet. One thing occurs to me as I write, both authors are JH and I am J and you are H; I wonder if this was part of the Editors' consciousness in planning such an interesting exercise?

The first few pages of Haley had me thinking of my current writing project, which relates the psychotherapy turf war between Psychoanalysis, Family Therapy and

Cognitive-Behaviourism to three ancient rhetorical traditions. In this war, Martin Seligman is Epicurus, Philip Barker is Hippocrates, and I am unsure who is Socrates, but Psychoanalysis has many Platos, and Haley is Protagoras. Protagoras was the head of the Sophists and one of Socrates' teachers. Hippocrates was keen to meet Protagoras, so Plato escorted the young physician to a debate between Protagoras and Socrates. Protagoras was eloquent, expert, persuasive but Socrates undid him by using the same techniques whilst making the domain of argument a moral rather than social space.

Haley rarely ventures into the moral domain. He eschews the words 'good' and 'bad' almost completely, preferring such pairs as helpful/unhelpful and useful/unuseful. His major 'moral' edict is really technical: that therapy is about change. Thereafter, it is left up to the teacher and the learner to establish if they meet such a criterion. Change *as principle* is moral assertion. Change *as practice* is evident in the social, and certainly not in the intra personal.

Haley's rhetoric, which is fairly complete by the end of the third chapter, shows fine ability with the Sophists' art. There is a proper domain of therapy: the social (the improper is interior and psychodynamic). There is a proper view of history of therapy (the enlightened present versus the improper dark ages of psychoanalysis). There is a proper view of the client (a family with a problem not a patient with a psychodynamic disorder). Chapter 4, 'The Client', completes a rhetorical drift from 'therapy' to 'brief therapy' to 'social' 'therapy' to 'systems' 'therapy' to 'brief family systems therapy'. This argument is mediated with a brief history of Haley's long association with hypnosis, various case studies, supervisory notes, and pearls of wisdom.

To the reader of this, I must, by now, have exposed my intellectual preferences. I am a psychodynamic therapist who likes to work with families. But, although I find

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myself clashing incessantly with Haley, I still find the reading interesting, useful, and wise.

Take this long excerpt:

One of the major changes in therapy now taking place is the pressure on the trainee therapist to learn to deal with all sorts of problems. To survive today a therapist must be a generalist, not a specialist. In the past a therapist would specialize in children's problems, or marital problems, or eating disorders. With the new ways of financing therapy through managed care, therapists must be able to deal with whatever problem comes through the door ...

Learning to be a therapist doesn't mean merely learning a set of skills, as one would with carpentry. The instrument of change is the therapist, and that instrument can be uncertain or faulty. It's the supervisor's job not only to teach therapists *what* to do but to help them when they find themselves with personal reactions that keep them from functioning as they should. Trainee therapists are asked to respond to, and change, human beings in distress when in their naivete they may find the problem presented to be unbelievable. (Other problems may be familiar to them from their own experiences.)

I hope this book will help clinicians who are learning therapy, teaching therapy, or practicing in these changing times. Therapists learn to change people, and in the process they often change themselves. The supervisor serves as a guide to achieve those ends. When dealing with a case, the trainee focuses on the client, while the supervisor focuses on both the client and the trainee. While concerned about the needs of the client, the supervisor must also consider what the trainee knows and how to enlarge his or her range of skills. The supervisor might know several ways to approach various symptoms; the one chosen should help the client change and also help increase the trainee's experience with therapy interventions.

Supervisors must teach trainee therapists to be skilful technicians while responding sensitively to a client's misery and distress. Supervising is the teaching not only of techniques of therapy but also of an appreciation and understanding of tragic human dilemmas. Therapists must become experts in helping clients, which can be taught, but they must also be sensitive and human, which perhaps, cannot be taught.

Some trainees become so immersed in theories that they seem inhuman ... (Haley, 1996: 12–13).

This excerpt begins with the recognition of accountability of therapists to busy clients and to managed care insurance companies, and therefore, of the need for trainers to be accountable to trainees in teaching effective therapy technique. Therapists are responsible for change in clients. Supervisors are responsible for trainees. An anecdote follows, about one of Haley's many whimsical essays 'The Art of Psychoanalysis'. And it is followed by a reference to changing times—which means post-psychodynamic, problem focused, managed care, and student rights. Supervisors 'teach trainee therapists to be skilful technicians', who are 'sensitive and human'. Earlier, therapy was not carpentry, now it is useful domestic timber sculpture that is redolent with the sensitivities of the persons for whom the cabinets have been made. This is an expert role, but not one born of theory (by Haley's definition).

So, Protagoras proceeds, contrasting his preferences

with the evidently inferior alternatives. Pearls of wisdom that caught my eye include:

No one can learn to do therapy by reading about it (5).

Therapy, like any art, is taught in an apprenticeship system (6).

If therapy were only a skill, one could teach it as a set of techniques. However, therapists themselves are the instruments through which therapeutic techniques are expressed (8).

... a therapist can learn empathy for clients by being one (10).

... everything said and done in the therapy room should be taken as a message to the therapist about that context (12).

It is best for therapists to assume that clients communicate in different ways, and that when they wish to speak more explicitly about something, they will do so. When body movement is interpreted, the client begins to withhold more and more information for fear the therapist will make upsetting issues explicit. In sum, it is not only disrespectful but a technical error to point out to clients what their indirect communication 'really' means (13).

As can be seen, true notes can be heard on nearly every page, amidst the chatter and clang of the rhetoric. I think Haley's view of history is selective, his understanding of psychodynamics is 1950s American Psychiatric farce (see Jacoby, 1971; 1981), his insistence on 'the problem as the problem' is beguiling (as it has always been in the field; many take issue with this, including the Milan group, Furman and Ahola, Framo, Whitaker ...), and his avoidance of moral issues is rigorously maintained at a technical level.

I suspect the soundness comes from an ethics of open description; but this ethics is buried in technical and expert assertion about what is involved. I am unsure how a trainee would understand this book. As another professional viewing the book from a position that Haley does not respect much, I notice a willingness to claim authority through belittling of alternates. I am not sure that a novice would feel altogether comfortable with a teacher taking such a position; although, perhaps, there is a little room for others on the high moral ground.

I will enjoy more reading of Haley and will enjoy both the battle and the plucking of the pearls,

Regards,

J

Dear Helen,

I trust you received my earlier note on my beginning reading of Haley. Hildebrand is much shorter and much less complicated than Haley. So I find myself about half way through and having a fair feeling for the book.

The aims and style of the book are much more modest than Haley's. There is no standing on a dais addressing all with authority, longevity, wisdom, and certainty. Hildebrand is tentative as she seeks to establish the legitimacy of what she is writing about. She even quotes Haley's view that should there be personal issues that are interfering with

the conduct of therapy, the supervisor should deal with these. Hildebrand's own view is almost contrary, but she does not want to argue with Haley or anybody really, about what she considers to be a sound set of ideas, implemented well. This idea of the technical lying outside of the moral domain is the greatest similarity of Haley and Hildebrand.

Hildebrand is writing about a subject within Masters' level Family therapy courses in London. This subject, known as the Module of Personal and Professional Development (PPD), promotes personal change that is not therapy and promotes professional competence, but is not supervision.

Hildebrand's writing is almost painfully tentative and apologetic—and long-winded, as she tries to find a position for her endeavours. She certainly wants to avoid the psychodynamic proposition that all therapists need to have therapy to be competent therapists.

Part of the problem is that she refuses to stand on a pedestal like Haley, whilst she is trying to find a theorised justification for her endeavours. She is keen to call her position systemic and is keen to declare it not to be psychoanalytic. This is definitely problematic as the PPD was developed with family therapist and psychoanalytic psychotherapist Arnon Bentovim, and involves activities that require talking through of feeling states and recognition of pain. However, interpretations and transferences are not considered appropriate to the activities; Hildebrand prefers to describe the change position of the trainees as reflexivity.

The bulk of the book is a listing of semi-structured activities engaged in by the trainees, which are divided into three stages: early, middle, and late. The activities are definitely directed toward personal awareness and professional enhancement in a group setting. Each activity is described simply and is accompanied by notes on timing, style, caveats, and professional pointers. All of which is useful, clear, and demonstrative of the value of each activity.

There is apparent flow from activity to activity, but an issue is whether the work of the training group does indeed flow, given the number and range of tasks. Between the tasks there seems to occur much of the business of group life, personal awareness, and professional enhancement. This is an ordinary fact of any learning; the lecture group comes to understand concepts in the caf, the seminar group discusses what has been read beforehand. But there is little sign of what this process of discussion, digestion and expansion is like and how important it is in the overall scheme of things. The tasks are the sum of what is presented, and this is not enough.

Maybe Hildebrand's apologetic stance was necessary because it is not an altogether convincing presentation of the need for such a module within a Family Therapy training course. The theory base is not clear. The activities are not convincing. I await the news from the students reported in the later part of the book,

Regards,

J

Helen Pavlin Writes: A Note Upon Re-surfacing

The Editors gave me two books to read. They hoped I would write stimulating reviews of them and more specifically, it seemed, engage in some sort of provocative exchange with another reader-writer about them.

The Haley book arrived first. I plunged in. Almost at once, I found my hackles rising. Haley is famous, much-quoted, much published. Why does such a well-established figure expend so much energy on mocking other schools of thought? When is he going to stop taking cheap shots at others and reveal what he himself has to offer? Writing for publication in 1996, why did he keep dragging in derisive anecdotes about therapy in the 1950s? Why do we have to wait till page 142 before being offered the first detailed case-study? For someone so keen on not attributing the present to the past, why was so much of the book about the past? A systemic therapist myself, why was I so protective of analytic, psychodynamic, even behaviourist and cognitive thought? Why was I so defensive? Why couldn't I enjoy Haley's wit and just get the point?

Haley was arrogant as far as I was concerned. I took him on plane-trips, I allocated him weekends, but I disliked his company and made little progress. I relegated the volume to the status where its content would have to reach me by osmosis—it was always naggingly nearby, but rarely opened.

Then the Hildebrand arrived. A slender book in the Karnac Systemic Thinking and Practice Series. It seemed easy to read, straightforward in its aims and in its acknowledgment of its limitations, academic without being at all abstruse, free of posturing, genuine, reporting on work thoughtfully carried out and worth reading about. I skimmed through it and found myself recommending incorporation of the approach outlined into a family therapy training course which was being discussed locally. But I was loath to part with the book to allow the trainers to consider it first-hand. It, too, was needed for osmotic purposes.

Somewhere between these two experiences, I received in the post the text from my 'provocative' counterpart. He certainly knew what the word meant! Having read it once, I put it far from any pile of reading matter which was supposed to complete its penetration of the brain by osmosis. Repeatedly during the following months, the envelope containing the 'provocative' response was lost. Upon finding it again, I would reunite it with Haley and Hildebrand's books and leave them to osmose with each other for long periods enclosed in dark briefcases.

There came a time (a long weekend) when I was too embarrassed to negotiate further delay with the tactful Editors. I would dedicate the entire weekend to re-reading both books. This meant I had to first finish the Haley if I was to re-read the whole thing. Not so hard, although his last essay struck me as cynical.

The weekend is at an end. It is now my own changed responses to the two books which provoke me.

Haley I found, on this reading, to be a writer with a profound and personal awareness of the history of therapy over the last 50 years who, while indeed exaggerating and mocking the old ways, acknowledges that he was part of those ways. I found that I could allow him his perspective: he had put in the hours, the years, he had been one of 'them' and had more right than most to broadcast his criticisms now.

He emphasises authority, power, hierarchy, direction in the interview, preceded by planning and always, for the trainees, accompanied by supervision. At the same time, he emphasises the responsibility of the therapist and particularly of the supervisor. He even, I was surprised to note, given my initial response to him, emphasises courtesy. He shows compassion both for clients and trainees. He shows thoroughness and commitment. On this reading, his 'arrogance' may be seen to be the urgency of one who has discovered something overwhelmingly important and wants to spread it so that all may get the benefit and be spared the ignorance and futility associated with the old ways.

And what of Hildebrand? Her work seemed rather tame, at times pedestrian on this reading, worth doing, certainly and worth documenting, but not really special.

This is all getting very wearing, my own pendulum responses. But at last, before the weekend is out, I have put pen to paper. I have been provoked. Whether I can be provocative to others remains to be seen. Perhaps the contents of the envelope will play a part. Do I dare exhume the envelope from the dark brief-case? Dare I reread its contents, fortified at least and at last by a surprised fresh rereading of the books themselves?

The envelope contains two letters. I had forgotten. Each written part way through one of the books. Each thoughtful and stimulating—one overwhelming in a way Maureen suggested words for: 'You've just been spooked because he knows more philosophy than we do'.

I guess that was it. Well, it's good to be dealing with everyone again: Haley, Hildebrand, Jo Grimwade and the Editors. Maureen and Hugh, I know you'll be at the conference. Will you be at this one, Jo?

Regards out of my long silence.

Helen Pavlin

Jo Returns

Dear Helen,

Your thoughts about the JH books echo many of my own but seem to come from a rather different position.

At the content level, you have more directly identified the arrogant tone of Haley, but also his collected wisdom. Again, with Hildebrand, you identify her pedestrian contribution but realise the value of what she aims for. Like you, I have recommended the book to others interested in consciousness raising as one pathway for the training

of Family Therapists. I am not sure I would recommend Haley, except, perhaps, as an historical document providing an overview of the field and the wisdom of one of its most successful practitioners and trainers. There is something very sectional about the Haley book, whereas the Hildebrand one has a wider appeal and application.

So two very different books, with similar education aims, reviewed by two different writers with different styles, yet agreement about their value. What might this mean? I have spent some time thinking about this, our 'partnership', and the field in general.

You seem to have written for the Editors, and through them, to the readers of *ANZJFT*. This is a sort of task orientation that Haley would have admired: do the work, don't be concerned with making friends or creating fine narratives. Yet, your content is a narrative about living with two books, a floating envelope, and the expectations of external authorities (Editors); you seem to have been less amused by the task than I have been. The 'What does this mean?' question was never far from your writing—as Hildebrand would want it.

For me, I was always interested in the parallel process issues and was keen to develop the connections between ideas, persons, historical narratives and so forth—and more will follow. Yet, really I have been quite hard-nosed about the task. I have wanted to get it done, sent it off and waited for a reply.

Judy Hildebrand's whole book is a careful balancing of 'almost-therapy' with the demands of formal (Masters level) academic training. The learning groups have a Bion flavour. In fact, most of the structured tasks endeavour to balance academic orientation with personal development (I can imagine Hildebrand including a task where students are asked to write reviews of two books in pairs, by correspondence!).

Bill O'Hanlon (in Dublin, 1989, First World Congress of Family Therapy) described Haley, in conversation, talking about children's capacity to oppose, and how to solve the opposition with benevolent binds. Haley's daughter was refusing to put on a jumper on the way out of the door, in winter. Chloe Madanes was becoming increasingly annoyed. Haley intervened 'Put on your sweater, your mother's cold!'

Taking the rule that what matters in therapy is what works does not prevent history catching up with you, eventually. As history will catch up with context driven solution and inspiration, it would be better to raise one's consciousness at the outset, lest the unfolding history of our relationships might reveal us to be hostile or sexist or racist in contexts we had not, at the time of the therapy, recognised as containing those traps. By all means, ask the child to wear the jumper because her mother is cold, but recognise the domestic myth that such a formulation perpetuates (and come back to it at the next opportunity!)

Which brings me to questions of gender. Haley takes the Master's role (O'Hanlon said that Haley sees power as central to the human condition and Madanes views sexuality as central!) Hildebrand's approach, if not especially feminine, is about collaboration and communi-

cation. We both would seem to view Hildebrand's as the more appropriate set of values.

Throughout the history of family therapy there have been the clever men (Jackson, Haley, Minuchin, Boscolo, de Shazer) and the wise women (Satir, Hoffman, Selvini-Palazzoli, Goldner, Insoo Berg) and this contrast we both seem to observe in these texts.

Maybe some will see the same pattern in our parallel process. I wonder if this is relevant to the task presented by the Editors. I look forward to your next letter.

Jo Grimwade

Now Helen

Dear Jo,

How much braver than I you have been throughout this correspondence in addressing the parallel process evident between ourselves, J and H, and the writers (both JH). And how interesting you make it by adding that little human anecdote about one of the JHs and CM! I have no such anecdotes, but I enjoyed yours immensely.

And I enjoy the verve of your writing, though, as you know, I was more than somewhat intimidated by the sustained Greek analogy of your opening. It was brilliant, of course, and intriguing, but also, it must be stated, showy. That qualifies you to line up with 'the clever men' in the parallel process you have aptly identified in all this. To sustain the image, we'll just have to assume that Hildebrand and I can make it into the lineup of the 'wise women' that you propose.

I think there is wisdom in Hildebrand's writing, even though I have used words like 'tame' and 'pedestrian' in describing it, and note that you make a related observation, calling it 'almost painfully tentative and apologetic'. Gill Gorell Barnes, writing the Foreword, identifies some of the key features in Hildebrand's work which reflect the systemic approach:

work takes place in public, within the context defined by the course, the boundary being held by all the participants, including the module leader. Trainees are therefore encouraged to voice aspects of their personal experience in ways that parallel the experience they will be asking of family members. Action, reflection and narrative about personal experience form part of the learning about 'self in context' (xii-xiii).

(More conscious use of parallel process).

Haley, on the question of a trainee's biases and whether these might cause problems in therapy, simply announces, 'If such a problem occurs with a trainee, the supervisor must solve it' (9). Referring to this view expressed by Haley, Hildebrand notes that this may not be so straightforward, for reasons of time and the possible inhibition occasioned for trainees by the fact that supervision is an assessed component of their training. She quotes Cecchin and others who make the point that 'People cannot reconsider their prejudices when they feel under threat' (3).

Hildebrand goes on to clarify further the perspective that shaped the approach chosen by herself and colleague, Bentovim:

We hoped to focus on the effects of personal experience on professional practice rather than on a consideration of the significance and meaning of each trainee's personal experience (4).

This is indeed what Barnes was talking about in the Foreword, and, for someone like Hildebrand, whose background had assumed the importance of personal therapy for the training of a therapist, it demonstrates a striking shift of emphasis from the personal to the public domain.

Of course, there are likely to be differences in the supervision experiences offered by Haley and Hildebrand, as the former is so strongly committed to a directive approach, but, while it proceeds in parallel with the training, supervision is not Hildebrand's focus in the present text. The exercises included in the book suggest a disciplined and organised approach to the subject-matter, tempered by respect for process.

Hildebrand sets out the four linked stages of every group meeting:

- group preoccupations
- personal experience
- professional dilemmas
- interventions

She sees the art of managing such a group as 'allowing the work to develop organically out of the group themes and atmosphere' (12-13). In saying this, she emphasises also the importance of the group leader's being able to engage quickly and having an understanding of the aims and demands of the training, specifically differentiating this from a more traditional, passive group work model. Would Haley exempt her, I wonder from the sneering tone he reserves for therapists who wait to see what the client brings?

The more I consider these two texts which the Editors invited us to discuss with each other, the more I am struck by the distractingly different modes of each writer: Haley is blustering, colourful, confrontational, by turns mocking, shaming, bullying and generally over the top. By such means he makes his points. Hildebrand, on the other hand, is practically demure, measured and considered in the points she makes.

In summary, I would say each has much to offer, but in each case, the reader has to contend with distractions more to do with style than content, before being able to grasp their full value. And perhaps such a comment could apply to our own interactions. Of these, too, after hesitating and stumbling along a path that at times I found rocky, I am glad to have been invited to make this journey and for the halting conversations I have been able to have with you, Jo, along the way.

Helen Pavlin

And Jo

Dear Helen,

I, too, have enjoyed the reading, the writing, and the exchange. I feel rather sad about the treatment given to

Haley, but the days of the Master have passed. Thanks for the chat and thanks to the Editors,

Jo Grimwade

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