

EDITORIAL

The Words We Use

As I read this edition, I am struck yet again by the inventiveness and originality of therapists in their search for ways to make sense of the client's world. I wonder if this search currently indicates a sense of discontent with the ways in which we have come to view the underpinnings of therapy? Are we seeing a trend away from postmodernism or a natural process of evolution and refinement of it? Relph suggests the latter. Is postmodernism losing relevance in therapy as it has in the worlds of art and architecture? If so, can narrative practice still be informed by a postmodern deconstructive discourse? Perhaps narrative therapy and postmodernism are parting company, the first returning to its literary roots, the latter to obscurity.

Authors in this edition are writing about alternatives: alternatives informed by architecture and feminism. The former (in Dean's conception) have a more problem-focused goal, offering novel ways of exploring the client's dilemma, and assisting in the solution. Notions of structure and form hark back to Minuchin and may reflect a male gendered perspective. Visual frameworks invoking the ability to rotate cognitively three or more dimensions offer alternatives to auditorially framed linguistic ones. The feminist perspective (described by Sanders) emphasises the preverbal origins of emotion and sees in postmodernism a masculinist bias that denies this. Unlike the first generation of family therapists, many of the early proponents of object relations theory and attachment theory were women although not perhaps feminists. Surely there is general agreement that early preverbal formative influences in terms of attachments form the basis of an enduring sense of self.

In this edition we have the opportunity to consider both the cross sectional and the linear, i.e. the structure and the process of its making. When the task of therapy is constituted in the very sense of self, then language alone, however constructed, just does not seem enough. If therapy is a solution-focused contractual event then we can play with discourses, interchange narratives creatively, and perhaps wonder at the end if anything 'real' happened. If our reality is only constituted in language, and I do not want to denigrate the importance of langu-

age, then perhaps any discontent with postmodernism has to do with an assumption that stories are exchangeable and interchangeable. I would like to think that we, in the richness of our humanity as thinking, feeling and at times non-rational beings, are much more than a set of constructs or stories to be artfully challenged.

So, in this short editorial I bring to the debate my own narrative which must inform all my efforts as a therapist. Belinda Sanders begins by locating herself in sociocultural terms. As well as being a family therapist, I am informed by a thirty year exposure to analysis, existential and experiential therapies, with humanistic and Jungian contaminants. I am white Anglo-Saxon and short—I could go on.

Whilst I am willing to be assisted from time to time by those I trust to see the world and myself in it from other perspectives, it is the times of inexpressible feeling that seem to constitute the deepest levels of any sense of who I am. Is it the domain of therapy to concern itself with these inexpressible realities, particularly if they are non-linguistically constituted? Can what is felt to be 'real' in this sense be changed for a client by linguistic manipulation? Can narrative therapists validate what is 'real' to a client through the experience of being that significant other, offering *themselves* as well as an alternative story? This seems dangerously close to attachment models of therapy. Perhaps it is the quality of our attachments, in terms of authenticity of relationships, that defines the place in which most of us would want to be 'located'.

Would it be easier to stick to solution-focused practice? Would it be easier to find creative and entertaining, but distancing, discourses? We might all live a bit longer, particularly in this time of economic rationalism when the nature of therapy is being limited by dollar considerations. The articles in this issue inadvertently raise concerns about the limitations of therapy itself, about the depth of the therapist's own personal engagement with the client, and about the sense of self brought by the therapist into the session.

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