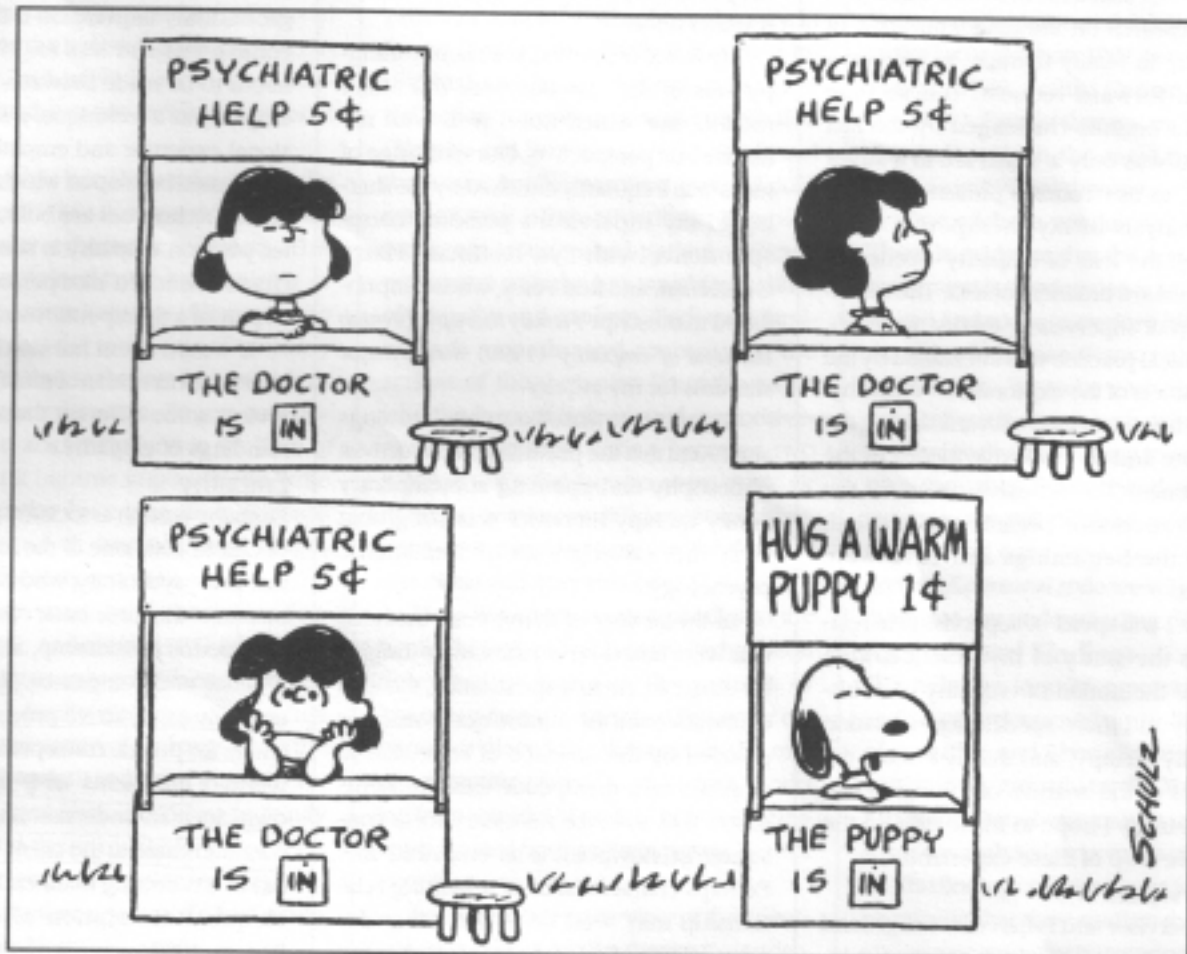


FAMILY THERAPY TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

The Changing Face of Family Therapy

by Peter Cantuwell



I have just finished listening to an audio training tape produced by Jay Haley on *The First Therapy Session* (1989). Quite early in the tape Haley mentions that when supervising trainees he is often concerned when he notices that a therapist is placing too much emphasis on formulating an intervention rather than first understanding the client. He also advises therapists against taking notes and using clipboards because they convey too clinical and distant an attitude.

He explains that when clients come to us for therapy they are caught in suffering and anguish and they need first and foremost a compassionate and understanding human being. In family therapy circles Haley is often depicted as a fairly directive therapist, and so I find it refreshing that he places so much emphasis on the human capacity of the therapist.

Such an emphasis is being strongly underscored in contemporary family ther-

apy literature. Harry Goolishian has been one of the primary forces for change in this direction with his emphasis on the expertise of the client system.

In an article published shortly before his death, *'Strategy and intervention versus nonintervention: a matter of theory'* (1992), he says that narrative therapy 'requires that the therapist continually adjust his or her understanding to that of the client(s). The therapist is always in the process of understanding, always on the way to understanding and, therefore, always changing'.

Lynn Hoffman, in a manuscript version of a new article, says that 'the job of the interviewer is to act as an interested listener, eliciting thoughts, playing back ideas, sharing feelings, but mostly leaving space that allows the family to come forward. The therapist who acts too much like an expert risks creating a respondent who feels too much like an idiot'. She adds that

'we can be extremely open about our rationales, our practices and our personal thoughts... We emphasise affiliation, appreciation and acceptance'.

continued on page 13

continued from page 5

Perhaps the most respectful therapy of all is embedded in the theoretical foundation of the reflecting team. Tom Andersen has an article in a soon-to-be published book called *Social Constructionism and Therapeutic Process* (1992) in which he discusses the thinking behind the evolution of the reflecting team.

"In our discussion we wondered how come we left the families and went away during the breaks in the sessions? How come we hide away what we were doing when we tried to find answers to this question? Maybe we should stay with the families and let them see and hear what we did and how we worked with the question? Maybe by giving them access to our process they would more easily find their own answers?"

Family therapy is changing its public face at this time of its history. I believe that two divergent strands of therapeutic development are crossing paths with a consequent mutual enrichment. Those two strands are humanistic and systemic therapy. For those trained in humanistic thinking and practice some of the above emphases of family therapy literature sound like reinventing the wheel. But this comment misses the gains for humanistic therapy of the findings of the systemic world.

Be the latter comment as it may, systemic therapy literature and practice is becoming aware of the need for compassion, respect and understanding as the underpinnings for any good therapy. As Moshe Lang says (manuscript): "The most important thing for a psychotherapist is to provide his patients with an ongoing active listening relationship. This is both the simplest, and yet the most difficult thing to do."

The healing power of being properly heard is generally underestimated and misunderstood. Listening does not mean sitting there and saying nothing, but rather engaging in a conversation and struggling to understand how the patient experiences his world, to try to help him put into words his thoughts, feelings, assisting him to consider his options in life.

The power of this kind of listening is multiplied when the therapist is capable of offering this to a couple or family—to people who are important to each other, who have lost, or never had, the capacity to hear each other.'

An old word for much of the skill involved in conveying understanding is empathy. Despite my many late night conversations with him, Harry Goolishian refused to admit that much of what he did comes under the rubric of empathy. Whatever about terminology, the attitudes and microskills of empathy are foundational to the compassion and humanity endemic to good therapists.

In this month's section of Family Therapy Training and Supervision, Rosemary Geer (page 6) has kindly agreed to share some of her research which embraced some of the overlap of the humanistic and systemic schools of thought. Rosemary is a psychologist and family therapist. She teaches humanistic psychology at La Trobe University and is in private practice at Glenlyon Counselling Centre, Brunswick. So thanks to Rosemary!

Bibliography

Goolishian, Harold A., & Anderson, Harlene

"Strategy and intervention versus nonintervention: A matter of theory"

Journal of Marital and Family Therapy Vol. 18, No. 1 (1992), 5-15

Haley, Jay

The First Therapy Session (audio program)
Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1989

Hoffman, Lynn

Relational Systems Work: Family Therapy in a Different Voice (manuscript)

Lang, Moshe

(Manuscript of a letter)

McNamee, S. and Gergen, K.

Social Constructionism and Therapeutic Process

London, Sage (in press)