



Audio and Video Review

Publication Reference:

Relph, A. (1984). Videotape Review of The Dictator and His Pregnant Daughter. Australian Journal of Family Therapy, 5(4), 309-310.

TITLE:

The Dictator and His Pregnant Daughter

THERAPIST:

Moshe Lang

YEAR AND PLACE:

1983, Blackamarah, New South Wales

LENGTH:

Approximately 1½ hours

CONDITION:

Video: Good. Sound: Excellent.

TECHNICAL DATA:

½" VHS, Black and White or ¾" U-MATIC.

AVAILABILITY:

Moshe Lang,
Williams Road Family Therapy Centre,
3 Williams Road,
WINDSOR, VIC.

REFERENCE:

Moshe Lang "Family Conflict and Stress and its Resolution by Family Therapy", *Mental Health in Australia* Vol. 1 No. 10.7.1983. Can be shown to the lay public.

'THE PLAY'S THE THING ...'

At first I wondered about the limitations of this being a role-played family but I soon encountered the wide range of merits and intricacies that this medium can generate.

Jackie, aged 25, is eight weeks pregnant. Her family, Mr and Mrs Forsythe and twin brother John, are in a state of alarm. Old rules don't seem to apply any more and the threat of major change in the family looms. Like many families, they have sought therapy in order to avoid changes rather than make them. The success of the three short sessions of family therapy that follow lies, at least in part, in the therapist subtly assisting the family to change while not attacking directly the family's powerful forces of conservatism.

During the first session each member of the family is encouraged to talk about their view of things. Mr Forsythe is dismayed by his daughter's pregnancy; he is used to being listened to and in control. Now his advice is being thwarted and he is worried about the good name of the family. Mrs Forsythe is quiet and concerned in the face of her husband's ranting — "His bark is worse than

his bite." she says. She wants Jackie's happiness to be the most important thing but also introduces the idea that it's unusual for her two children, aged 25, to still be living at home. John, Jackie's brother, is rival to his father, protector to his mother and sister. He informs the therapist that Jackie's pregnancy is not her fault but that of her parents and this introduces a discussion about how the problem is to be formulated, especially now that the outsider, the therapist, has joined the system.

Jackie says very little in this first session; she is uncertain and unassertive but, like her mother, she is less agitated than her father and brother.

Throughout this first session the therapist is very active. While firmly anchored in reality, he listens carefully to the family members. He apparently defers to the dictatorial father, without giving away his own power. He questions, but his questions continually move the recipient and the system in new directions. He is exploring with family members, not exploring them. Above all he is, from the outset, pushing and pulling on the family's construction of reality and with it expanding views and derestricting options. The therapist leaves the family with some questions to think about and to discuss. He wants the family's help in knowing which way to go. That there are solutions to the problems presented is not in doubt: the best path to the solutions is what needs to be decided upon.

A second session follows within days of the first and the third session is a follow-up some weeks later. The changes that take place are both simple and far-reaching. They are lifelike in that they are at once structural, strategic and systemic; and effect the individual level, the family level and the wider social level. Mr Forsythe unwittingly summarizes the apparently paradoxical crux of therapy from the family's, individual's and therapist's point of view: "When people present to you with something you can't change, something's got to change." Time is spent integrating these changes and facilitating both the therapists's and the family members' responses to them.

A number of themes are woven into the therapy with this family. There are the themes of sex and sexism. There is the theme of permission and power. And there is the theme of the reflection of family development and change in the individual's growth and autonomy. These are a few examples, but one of the great merits of this video, especially as a teaching aid, is that these issues are raised and yet are not neatly or superficially resolved. This is so, not only for these (often value-laden) content issues which are likely to provoke much useful discussion, but also for the process of therapy and the techniques that are used. Here too, things are not tied up neatly into bundles of easily labelled techniques, nor has there been any attempt to edit or highlight particular aspects. This leaves the observer, however inexperienced, with things to contribute and questions to discuss.

In the business of family therapy where there is often a focus on difference and on multiple versions of the world, it seems the videoed role play has an important place. It is a form of tautology which highlights comparison between the implicit and the explicit, the description and the explanation. This particular role play invites many productive comparisons. The therapist is listening to the individuals and the roles they are acting; the therapist is also actor-therapist. There is the difference or relationship between the therapist and the part he is playing and there is the difference between the role play family and the family on whom the play is based. Like all play or practice, there is much to be gained in the freedom to move, disconnected from the usual consequences of action, and much to be gained in the comparison of the play

with reality. This video offers some points of discussion about these issues including, after therapy has ended, part of the derolling and question-time session which followed.

Personally, I get more out of this video with every viewing. I have found it most valuable as a teaching aid and would recommend it to students and teachers of family therapy alike. In addition, it will be useful with non-professional audiences where confidentiality issues usually restrict live and video presentations.

The quality of the role playing is very high. The picture is slightly jumpy and fuzzy at times but in general good, and the sound is excellent.

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