

Letters

WEATHERING THE STORM

Unfortunately, publication of this correspondence has had to be delayed. The initial letter was received while Moshe Lang was overseas. Because this is a quarterly journal, it is our practice to ensure that right of reply is exercised at the same time as critiques of authors' work. — Editor

In reading "Weathering the Storm" (Lang, 1991) in the latest *Journal*, we wonder if there is some intention, either by the writer or by the editors, to intensify discussion around issues of violence in preparation for the arrival of Deborah Anna Luepnitz as a keynote speaker for the Family Therapy Conference in October.

Those who know of Lang's experience and sensitivity to gender issues, may surmise that it is perhaps the shortcomings of the section "Story Corner" that so glibly reduce the complexities of the therapy with this couple to an eloquent metaphor about the weather. From our reading of *Family Therapy, Feminist and Social Work* literature in reference to our work with violence, we have reached the conclusion expressed in this journal last year that "It is imperative that any therapist makes a clear statement to the couple that violence is a crime," and that "it is unethical for any intervention implicitly or explicitly to condone the behaviour". (McGregor, 1990). For the story to conclude with the woman thinking herself "lucky", the man appearing "more comfortable" with his "violent personality", and the couple appearing "to value their disagreements" which presumably still include violence, makes us wonder what steps were taken to ensure this woman's safety.

The story implies a deviation from the stance previously expressed in the *Journal*, that violence is always unacceptable although explainable in systemic terms (McIntyre, 1984; Newton, 1981; McGregor, 1990). Of concern to us in seeing this story in this journal, is its potential damage to Family Therapy and the *Journal*. As it stands, it is vulnerable to the sort of criticisms already levelled at Family Therapy's neutral stance which, when applied to sociopolitical inequalities, can be seen to maintain the status quo. As Luepnitz says, "We must offer methods that do not require adaption to the status quo" rather than 'relabel' or 'reframe' symptoms to make them seem more normal and less pathological (Luepnitz, 1990). To promote constructive discussion, it seems timely for the *Journal* to state its position on violence.

We look forward to hearing more about this case and following further discussion about not whether but how violence and issues of safety are addressed by family therapists.

Susie Costello — Joanne Donne — Eddie Gallagher

Helen Luntz — Karen Sutherland — Salli Trathen — Harvey Tuck

References

- Lang, M., 1991. Weathering the Storm, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 12, 2: 111.
Luepnitz, D.A., 1990. *The Family Interpreted: Feminist Theory in Clinical Practice*, New York, Basic Books.
McGregor, H., 1990. Conceptualising Male Violence against Female Partners, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*, 5, 11: 65-70.
McIntyre, D., 1984. Domestic Violence: A Case of the Disappearing Victim? *Australian Journal of Family Therapy*, 5, 4: 249-258.
Newton, A., 1981. Violent Marriages, *Australian Journal of Family Therapy*, 2, 1: 27-32.

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The Editor invited me to submit some stories to Story Corner. He chose "Weathering the Storm" as the first story to publish out of the ten submitted.

I am reluctant to respond to the letter of Costello *et al.*, since what I wrote was a story and not a "case" study. However, their criticism appears to me not of the story, but of myself and my therapy (as well as the Editor and the *Journal*).

In responding, I will limit myself to a few points:

- (1) To refer to the story as a "case" and calling for further discussion violates the integrity and spirit of what was intended.
- (2) I reject the proposition that any pressure groups can select some articles published in the *Journal* or elsewhere and elevate them to the status of an ideology from which no "deviation" is allowed.
- (3) I chose the word "violent" to describe Ben's behaviour even though I had doubts about the adequacy of this description. It is amazing to me therefore that without any additional information Costello *et al.* have no doubt or hesitation in asserting that "violent" equals "crime" and the only way to respond as a therapist to such a crime is by making a clear statement that this is so. Fortunately, many of us do not have such an ideological manual to refer to for the conduct of our therapy.
- (4) I believe all therapists daily see behaviour which could be described as violent, treacherous, cruel, dishonest etc. This behaviour is usually not automatically condemned and the absence of such condemnation cannot be regarded as condoning it.
- (5) Why did Costello *et al.* choose to ignore the statement that I attempted "direct" therapy with Ben and Susie? Is it that their direct methods are always successful? If not, what do they do if they don't work? Abandon their clients, report them to the police, make sure the woman goes to a refuge?
- (6) Just because Susie talked to me about Ben's violence with tears and distress, to assume that she is a weak, helpless victim who cannot look after herself and requires my help in assuring her safety, cannot be further from the truth and is sexist in the extreme.
- (7) Costello *et al.* letter raised the question, at least for me, to what degree the purpose of therapy is to be ideologically correct rather than the alleviation of suffering of our patients. To what degree do we impose our meanings on them, rather than allow them to explore their own meanings? Also, to reduce all possible ways of viewing reality to one universal truth pronounced by the therapist, or open up for exploration multiple ways of seeing and experiencing.

Moshe Lang

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"Weathering the Storm" was one of a number of stories made available by Moshe Lang for publication in Story Corner. That it was the first of the group published implies nothing about its quality in relation to the other stories. Having been accepted for publication, many considerations affect when an item appears.

The story was accepted by me without consultation with the Story Corner Co-ordinators, both of whom were unavailable at the time because of other commitments. While I try to give considerable freedom to Assessors and Co-ordinators and consult extensively, the final responsibility for *any* material published in the *Journal* must and does rest with the Editor.

The *Journal* deliberately publishes a range of material in a variety of formats and clearly states that the opinions expressed therein are not necessarily those of our personnel. A truly pluralist journal cannot operate without such a proviso.

While I regret any occasion when the *Journal* may give offence to some of our readers, I hope that the substantive issues involved in Story Corner and other sections will continue to be widely and rigorously discussed.

Moshe Lang, Susie Costello and her colleagues should be applauded for entering the spirit of the *Journal* to debate publicly such important and complex issues. This can only serve the field well.

Editor