

Book Review

PROVOCATIVE THERAPY

Frank Farrelly and Jeff Brandsma
Shields Publishing Co.
4 dollars 95 cents.

Client: I grew up thinking that I was . . . There was something wrong with me, and that I was no good.

Therapist: Well, now . . . Subsequent history has certainly confirmed your belief in yourself . . . Hasn't it?

Client: Up 'til now, I haven't - I told you, there is not very much in my life that I can feel . . . very good about.

Therapist: *There you go! Haven't made the grade as a mother, haven't made the grade as a . . . wife, haven't made the grade as a person!*

Client: (In irritated disbelief) *Why do you keep telling me this!*

Therapist: *Hell, you didn't even make the grade as a therapy client! . . . Did ya?*

Perls used to say that much of his job was provoking the patient, but I don't think he meant it quite like this. Frank Farrelly has evolved a system of therapy which grew out of Carl Roger's *Client Centered Therapy* and which reads like a cross between Bob Hope and Groucho Marx. However the intentions are serious and, according to his own reports, the results are very successful. The avowed goals of the therapy are to provoke the client into:

1. affirming his value as an individual.
2. asserting himself in task performances and relationships.
3. defending himself realistically.
4. getting in touch with the reality of his social situation and his responses to this.
5. risking communicating feelings of affection and vulnerability to others.

The theory is that by constantly provoking the client by irony, sarcasm, aggressive attacks in an atmosphere which is ultimately supportive and helpful, the client is encouraged to fight back at first verbally and after that in his behaviour and attitudes to life.

At the same time as overtly attacking the client with his words, the therapist is at the same time expressing his support and 'unconditional positive regard' on a non-verbal level, although there are not many examples of this apart from the odd tap on the shoulder or playful punch in the chest.

Frank Farrelly is obviously a warm, extroverted, friendly and humorous person and there must be some question about whether this therapy could be used by people of very different temperament. Carl Rogers after listening to a tape of Farrelly working said, 'I wonder, if others use this approach would they get the same results?' And another therapist said, 'when some of your graduate students first hear of provocative therapy and try it, they come across like sarcastic pricks.' It would certainly seem that the technique works for some people and with some therapists.

There is no evidence of failure. The whole thing feels absolutely right in an American setting with a background of Jewish American humour, jolly masculine pretend-aggressive behaviour, and the universality of the wisecrack. As a more inhibited Englishman, I tended to cringe at some of the exchanges and my personal prediction is that many English patients would do more than cringe.

But as well as the problem as to how much this approach is personal to Frank Farrelly and people like him, there are overtones of a natural cultural division.

However, this is my personal reaction. The book is extremely readable and, needless to say, amusing, with a wealth of detailed quotations and case histories. It is at the moment only published in America, but copies could be obtained through Self and Society.

V.M.