

# Letters

A lot of letters this issue, some of which we have cut in line with our policy of shortening long letters where we feel it is necessary. Can we remind you that, while we welcome your letters, they should be short and to the point?

Dear S&S,

As a practitioner committed to the successful development of the recently formed Independent Therapists Network I took exception to some of the comments made by Mark Matthews in his conference report on the ITN day conference held last November (S&S, May 1995).

First, if, as he writes, Mark believes the initiators of the conference to be 'honest, sincere people with the best of intentions', then why his concern that the ITN initiative 'could be seen as a clever way of creating a base for a training agency'? To be charitable, I don't begin to understand why Mark should make a point that seems quite irrelevant to the issues at hand; to be less charitable, his comment is open to the charge of being little more than a substanceless slur.

It is very likely that Network members will have concerns about the possibility of their means of livelihood being legislated away through centralised registration, but Mark's statement that 'the issue is really about earning money' is probably saying more about himself than it is about the generality of practitioners involved in the Network. I have no doubt that those who have committed themselves to the development of the Network generally have motivations that by far transcend the purely pecuniary.

A bit later Mark bemoans the lack of 'a plan to attract more people to use the

services'. No wonder, therefore, that Mark was disappointed by the conference, and 'left feeling frustrated'. It seems from his report that *he* came with a personal agenda around 'earning money' and 'plans to attract more (clients)', and then criticises the conference for not responding to his preconceived agenda! (Later he does admit that perhaps his 'path is different to that of the initiators').

Although he writes that it is 'too early to pass judgement' on the ITN initiative, Mark proceeds in his report to criticise the Network for having no aims, for the 'flimsy supposition' that 'five strangers are in any way more reliable than an individual', that 'it seems to offer little protection to the vulnerable', and that the start 'was not auspicious'.

After that lot, I'd hate to be in the firing-line if Mark *were* to decide to 'pass judgement' on the ITN! Just how anyone could expect a new organisation committed to plurality and non-hierarchical modes of functioning to have sorted out its *raison d'être*, operational procedures, founding principles etc. after just one initiating day-conference is quite beyond my comprehension.

Richard House

Dear S&S,

There's another side to the issues raised by Richard House's article on the right action for therapists when they fall in love

with their client (S&S, May). That is, what is the nature of all loving relationships? Here I'm assuming that the client is also in love with the therapist. I'm carefully not speaking of the client 'believing' themselves to be in love, or of 'returning' the therapist's love. If the love is mutual, then what's to be done if they are both really in love, really *really* in love?

If one does see a significant difference, then it suggests two sets of dubious assumptions about humanistic therapy and about relationships.

In the therapeutic relationship it is generally considered that transference and countertransference, openness and positive regard are somehow different from what goes on in 'normal' relationships. But the humanistic therapist does not leave bits of themselves outside the room when seeing a client, they are there within them. They usually choose not to display or disclose them, they may bracket off their own feelings (at least until supervision or their own therapy), but they don't cease to have them. The therapist actually does experience the client as boring, lovely, or whatever. The client experiences the therapist as supportive, directive, or such. The therapist may play a certain role to benefit the client, and the client behaves in a certain way in order to please or get what they want. The major difference between the therapist role-playing and the client acting-out is the degree of self-awareness. As therapy gradually increases a client's self-awareness they may well really experience the therapist as, say, a caring parent. And the therapist may well see the client as worthy of care.

In 'normal' relationships we see the converse, the flip side. In any relationship,

particularly a healthy and balanced one, there is mutual parenting and mutual self-support. Undoubtedly one's soulmate is so because they have a part which is the parent we never had or continue to need. So transference, countertransference, conscious and unconscious roleplay are always there in any relationship, it's just that we don't name them.

So if therapist and client do fall deeply in love with one another, what's to be done? They can terminate therapy and contact, and both lose the love of their life – which is rather a waste. They can terminate, have a cooling-off period, and then, if love is still alive, get together – and undoubtedly continue an informal therapeutic relationship. They can remain in a non-intimate therapeutic relationship and really work through their feelings, which will probably kill off the love on both sides! This could be seen as satisfactory or as a self-destructive waste. Or they can become lovers and continue the therapy, which will then become artificial.

I don't see how one can decide what is best without considering what a mutually loving relationship is in the real-life context. There is another issue which is equally pertinent – what do therapists get out of being therapists, aside from money and status?

*Tony Morris*

Dear S&S,

Unfortunately your sub-editor had to put their blue pencil through part of a sentence in my book review of *Affliction* by Fay Weldon. 'A good antidote to anyone who takes the missionary position about their therapy very seriously indeed' was transcribed as 'A good antidote to anyone

who takes their therapy too seriously.' The pun on missionary position was meant to suggest our propensity to want to be aggressive and evangelical about therapy, trying to convert and change the minds and lives of other people, and it was not intended to mean that one should not take one's own therapy seriously. I have had continuous therapy for some fifteen years now and I do take my therapy very seriously.

*Dave Jones*

Dear S&S

I welcome the articles on revenge in your current issue, but am surprised by the lack of consideration of historical influences in the piece by Jessica Woolliscroft. Her analysis starts by assigning three basic characteristics to revenge: hatred towards the perpetrator of an injury, retaliation, and inability to be satisfied by a retaliatory act. This last one gives a clue to the missing element: past hurts and unresolved distress, and the tensions associated with them. Surely it is the inability of most of us to dissociate current events from past ones that drives the revenge machine beyond what might be seen to be a reasonable, non-punitive response.

When we are able to experience current hurts without significant emotional reference to past ones, then it is possible to experience just responses, such as just revenge, followed by satisfaction and possible forgiveness. Woolliscroft writes of 'just retribution', and differentiates between revenge and retribution, without explaining the difference. By differentiating she allows for 'just retribution' but not 'just revenge', yet there is no difference, though there is a difference between a just

revenge/retribution and a punitive one. It is the latter which remains unsatisfied, perpetuating conflict and tension, and relying on old tensions to fuel it.

*Tony Wilson*

Dear S&S,

Robert Towler in his article about 'cults' (S&S, March 1995) makes a number of inaccurate, misleading and unsubstantiated points about co-counselling. Long-standing readers of S&S will be well aware of the nature of co-counselling, as it has featured in the magazine a number of times. For others I would like the opportunity to make one or two things clear.

There are two main bodies of co-counselling; the Re-evaluation Co-counselling communities (RC) headed by Harvey Jackins who first developed co-counselling, and CCI (Co-counselling International), which started as a breakaway from RC. The two differ considerably in organisation and significantly in method. Robert Towler did not say which body he was referring to, or indeed whether he was referring to activities of people calling themselves co-counsellors who have no connection with either body.

Co-counselling is a self-help activity and co-counsellors are not trained to offer services to other people. It is based on work done in pairs. There are peer groups, workshops and training events organised by and for co-counsellors, but participation in any of these is entirely a matter of individual choice. The client is always in charge, which makes it a particularly safe form of therapy. The basic training, which is a requirement for anyone to become a co-counsellor, is – in CCI co-counselling at least – widely available. The University

of Surrey has offered courses in co-counselling for many years. CCI is an international network of co-counsellors, and has no formal structure; it therefore has no mechanism by which power can be abused in the way one associates with cults.

Like any therapy, co-counselling does little for some people. For others it takes time to make progress. For some people who are ready for it, especially if they have not experienced similar ways of working, co-counselling can be quite dramatically effective and empowering. It can also be absorbing and disturbing, and new co-counsellors may become very absorbed in their new found self and tend to 'exclude' people they no longer see the benefit of being with. As a result their friends and family may see a similarity with the behaviour associated with cults, and may get in touch with organisations like IN-

FORM. Co-counselling, like any effective therapy, does help people to get out of disadvantageous relationships!

*John Talbut*

Robert Towler of INFORM replies:

Since he complains of nothing else, I assume that what John Talbut really objected to in my article was my saying that co-counselling bears a certain resemblance to organisations we call cults, and yet what he himself says in his reply only serves to bear out my point. If a group or movement allows and even encourages a new 'member' to change radically and to become absorbed to the point of rejecting former friends, it should not be surprised when labelled by outsiders a cult, for that is what the word means. No adverse judgement is necessarily intended, and some cults, for some people, are a thoroughly Good Thing.

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## ***The AHPP Page***

### *Whiz Collis*

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**O**ur last General Meeting in May was preceded by a well attended workshop on Complaints. People shared their experience of being involved in complaints from both sides and as panel members, co-ordinators or complaints officers. Ulrike Encke then gave a talk on how the AHPP had dealt with complaints over the past years, how she felt the system might be improved, and how difficult the feelings are for all those involved in this process. Tone Horwood facilitated an experiential workshop, and we ended up working in

two groups with suggestions about what we wanted to look at in further workshops. Suggestions ranged from contracts with clients; the difference between sloppy practice, bad practice and abusive practice; needing a 'safe' space to acknowledge where we had gone wrong with clients, and the support of other members when we felt we had fallen short of our own standards; also the needs of AHPP in this process and how we can support and get the best support from our members. Tone Horwood is planning a further workshop