

# The Calgary Participator

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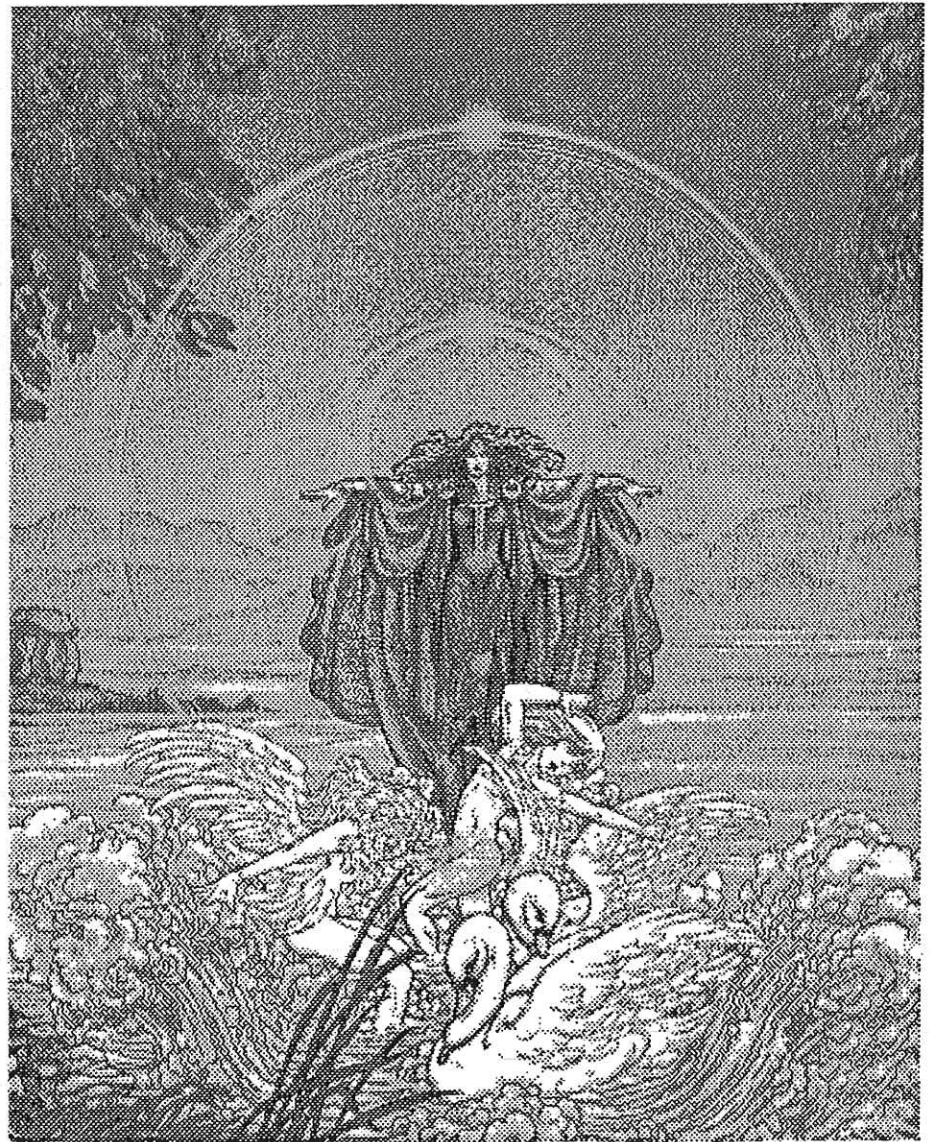


Illustration by Jim Fitzpatrick

I sing of a time that is legend  
I speak of a race that is myth,  
I know of a place of enchantment,  
I have known the *Children of Uir* ...



# Editorially Speaking...

Welcome back! You are now reading our second edition of *The Calgary Participant* and we would like to thank all of you who responded so graciously, by enjoying and giving encouragement, to the first edition. You may be interested to know that the first edition was mailed to a large number of professionals in the west coast and northwest areas of Canada and the U.S.A. The first issue was well-received, and thus, we hope so will be the current one.

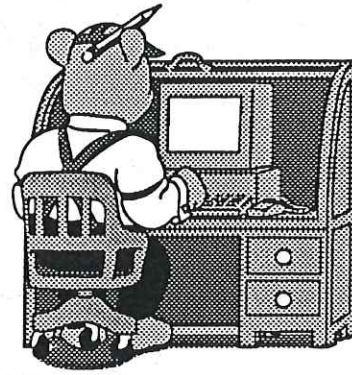
In this issue, we can share with you some very special experiences of the writers that have been synthesized from exposure to either conference visitors who have revitalized our interest in constructive human endeavor or from personal interaction and/or clinical practice. In the interim, since the first *Participant*, two conference experiences have significantly affected our thoughts here at the Family Therapy Program. Nollaig Byrne, Philip Kearney, and Imelda McCarthy came to Calgary from Dublin, Ireland, to present their *Fifth Province Model* of resourcing systems which they have developed, primarily for use in orienting to problems of incest, power, and inequality. Although the manner in which the Irish Team present their work, and the nature of the work itself, is unique and seems to have the potential to bear remarkable therapeutic fruit—it is the nature of the interaction among Nollaig, Philip, and Imelda—that lifts the hopefulness and the spirit of the observer (larger system, clinical worker, client, etc.).

In a time of pressure and mistrust, release from constriction and fear are the needed healing remedies. How better to meet these needs than by basking in the language of *all possibilities* within a context of *unconditional regard*. We, as family therapists, probably think that we serve as such a therapeutic resource but do we really understand what that means? What kind of relationship would we best have with ourselves to serve therapeutically? What sort of relationship do we need to develop with our everyday workmates and how do we extend our therapeutic orientation into our larger systems working environment? There aren't easy answers to these questions--

yet, if we fail to examine the effects of our functional orientations--what are we doing to the people we serve? Thus, one important part of our obligation to our clients is to be well-informed about family therapy theory and practice. However, equally important, we need to integrate this knowledge. Without compassion for the damaging effects of unfortunate life experiences on ourselves, our fellow workers, and our clients, we may charge around in allegedly therapeutic endeavor, that may suit text-book and perhaps even rational criteria, but may fall short of providing anyone in our interactional domain with actual life support. In fact, much hasty therapeutic endeavor perpetuates harm. And it seems so easy to forget the realms of the possible from both omnipotent or pessimistic postures. Nollaig, Philip, and Imelda remind us that there are more creative postures which can arise from valuing the *sacredness* and *vibrance* of human life, and that living together--in *loving kindness*--does not mean enduring a saccharin existence.

Two features in this issue address aspects of the *Fifth Province Model: The Fifth Province of the Irish Team* and *If the Doors of Perception Were Cleansed*.

A second conference that has seemed to have had high provocative impact on the thinking of local family therapists was the Virginia Goldner conference entitled *Feminism and System Practice: Two Critical Traditions in Transformation*. The very nature of the conference subject matter seemed to imply a *females-only* attendance and this veiled implication resulted in only a few males attending the conference, and in some of these males taking flak for asking well-intended questions to obtain more information. This occurrence led to dialogue among male and female therapists about the male-female interface, particularly at conferences. Some doubt emerged about what hopefulness there is for any genuine understanding between the sexes when women seem to be unwilling to nurture the efforts some men make to better understand women's experience



and when men appear to expect women to take responsibility for their comfort in these endeavors. Jon Amundson and Alan Parry's article *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, creatively, with

*tongue-in-cheek*, addresses this issue. In an article on a related subject *Investigating Specifications for Personhood: Escaping the Influence of Role Rigidity*, Rob Doan considers a treatment approach which he has found helpful is aiding two clients escape their cognitive frame-of-reference for *selfdom*. A step-by-step general description of this process is provided which includes examples of therapist questions and an intervention ritual.

Additionally, in this issue we have included a short overview of Dr. Karl Tomm's (and colleagues') research work with respect to interpersonal patterns and their effects. Karl initiated this research in order to provide an alternative explanation to DSM diagnostic criteria. The PIPS and HIPS approach integrates the processes of assessment and intervention to foster healthy interpersonal behaviour. We have also incorporated three representations of personal experience kindly shared by three very special *pioneers*.

As the articles in this *Participant* may have evoked a noteworthy response within you, the reader, please send your reflections about the ideas presented. Also, we would like you to send us articles representing your *Participants' Conference* presentation--or other relevant articles you may wish to have published in the *Participant*. With more generative public dialogue we can all benefit. It is our hope that you enjoy this issue and that the information contained here becomes an interactive experience for you and that it serves to further you in your journey to be a healer and to be healed.

We are looking forward to seeing you at the *Participants' Conference!*

Carol L. Liske, Ph.D.  
Gary Sanders, M.D.  
Alan Parry, Ph.D.  
Myrna Fraser, B.Sc.N.  
Editorial Committee



# The Fifth Province of the Irish Team

A Participator Profile Interview with the Irish Team:  
Nollaig O'Reilly Byrne, Imelda Colgan McCarthy, and Phillip Kearney

by Carol Liske & Karl Tomm  
(Edited by C. Liske)

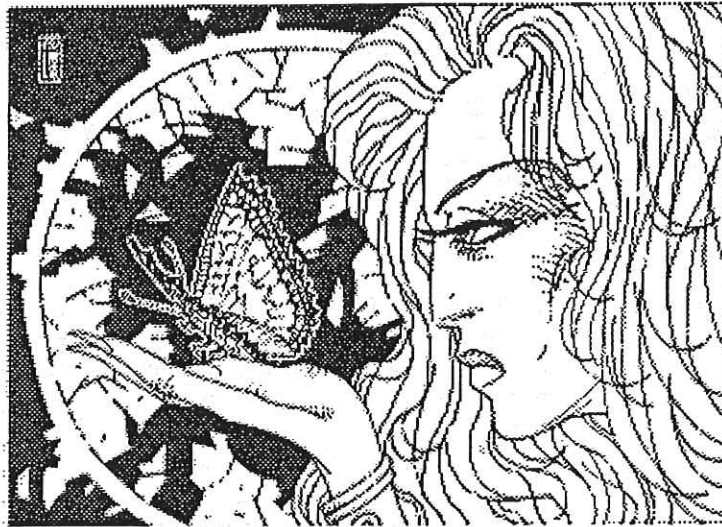
*Editor's Note: Nollaig, Philip, and Imelda have been acquainting various communities with their Fifth Province Model to attempt to foster the creation of cooperative space within and among interactive collectives (i.e., families, agencies, societies, etc.). The Fifth Province Model represents a systemic approach which has been developed and refined by the Irish Team over the past ten years. The model has evolved from work with "incest-disclosed" systems, and addresses broader issues of power and social inequalities, such as is involved in poverty, gender, and violence. Metaphors drawn from Irish mythology, literature, and art underpin the model. From the suggested posture of "cooperative space," nonabusive conversations may take place between clients and professional helpers to quicken the healing process. The respectfulness Nollaig, Imelda, and Philip show to all the parties with whom they consult, and their creative use of language to vividly reflect personal experience, distinguishes their contributions as unique to the field of therapeutic human endeavor.*

One legend, that of the *Children of Lir*, has poignantly resonated in the lives of Nollaig, Imelda, and Philip. It is briefly summarized here to help you feel its reverberation in what they are and do:

Once in the Kingdom of *Tir faoi Thuinn*, the Land Beneath the Waves, four children were born to Eva, wife of King Lir who was Lord of the Sea. Being People of the Goddess *Danu*, they were immortal and pure. As fate would declare, their beautiful mother was taken from them to *sleep*, leaving them alone with their grieving father. Their mother's sister, Aife, the most beautiful woman in the land, after Eva, was a sorceress and could transform almost anything to another. Aife became jealous of King Lir's love for his children and she wished them out of her life. Since she could not kill them, Aife doomed them to live as swans for nine hundred years. As swans, the children dispersed and had many trials and adventures which brought them to *Mocha the Holy*

who read to them the *Word of God*. In gratitude, they sang in the tiny church he had built. With the high sweet notes of Mocha's bell the children returned to their human forms. Rejoicing the miracle of transformation, they offered their hearts to Christ, in Love. For a time, they journeyed in the human world, giving of themselves. In the end, their Mother came for them and took them *Home*.

Carol: Well, what impressed me a great



deal about your work is that you as-a-team, have come to some place within yourselves, some sort of life journey of your own that gave you the way you have with people which is unusually gentle, inviting of openness, and respectful. And I wondered if each of you would mind talking a little bit about your own life journeys. I don't mean the whole story, but some essential elements that might have led you to be the people you are?

Philip: Great question. A tough one.

Carol: Maybe I can help you a little. I saw you, Philip, particularly you, as perhaps an activist and it seemed that you gave a flavour of that. You also gave a lot of flavor of really caring for people. And it seemed to me that you had carried your activism to the ultimate, you know, which I have some-

times viewed as though one were reflecting the sun in a clear glass of water as opposed to reflecting the sun in muddied water. You have a very different sparkle. And my sense is somehow you have learned to be the clear glass of water for what could be done, and I just really wondered about that?

Philip: It's nice to hear you say that. I don't see myself at all as a clear glass of water. It feels very muddied and it has been for quite some time. But there was something about the feedback from the audience, as I said, was just so reassuring, as if the doubts that I'd been experiencing in recent years, that I was never going to be the kind of activist that I wanted to be, that I could set them aside to some degree. That between the three of us we had managed to achieve collectively a statement that I couldn't make as an individual. That obviously has to do with our different experiences and that we are of

different genders and we have different backgrounds.

Carol: How do you think you got to passive activism, or not passive activism, but gentle activism?

Philip: It's something to do with my experience of the women's movement and feminism that's been a very formative influence for me. I've been thinking about it over the last few days. A really formative influence for me was that of the *Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp* in the early '80s, outside one of the nuclear bases in Britain. They allowed men to be involved as support to people and we either prepared the food or took care of the kids but it was essentially a *women only* happening. I was tremendously struck by the way in which the women organized. How they managed to achieve a consensual style of organization, which



was peaceful, non-hierarchical--nobody got savaged in this. It was still focused, still quite effective and I think that was quite a transformative experience. It has really left me committed to [gentle activism]. Well, I was at the same time very disillusioned with the established options which were organizations run by men.

**Carol:** What did you see in those organizations?

**Philip:** The ones run by men? People ended up being savaged, abused, belittled, and destroyed. And so I think I over-reacted. I think I became very invested in the idea that we need women leaders, or we need women organizers. I found myself very programmed by that cult since then and I think it was an over-reaction because I've known some very gentle, significant men in my life too. But when you asked me the question, I go back to that as a very formative experience that has stayed with me.

**Carol:** I hear more and more men talk about things like that. Sometimes I find it surprising that men could actually appreciate women's ways as much as some men do.

**Philip:** I'd be as critical of as many women as I would be of men, because there is only a very small group of women who took that particular kind of initiative and went that far. But that's my initial response.

**Carol:** How do you think this experience led you toward a *fifth province* journey with Nollaig and Imelda?

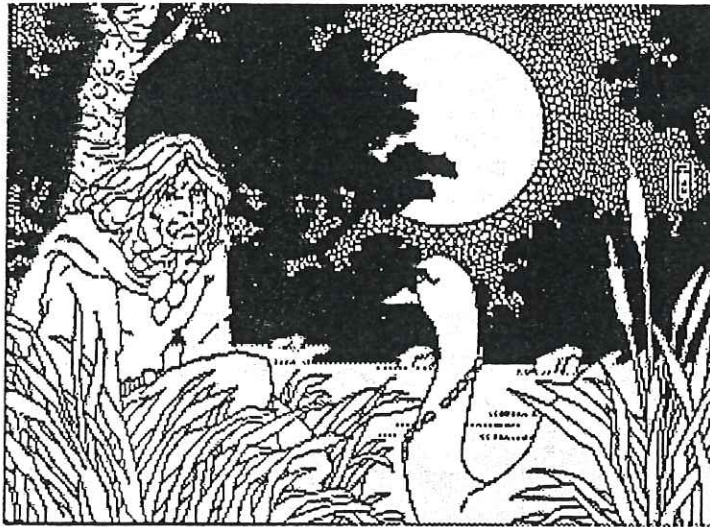
**Philip:** I can't yet stand back far enough to make sense of how we three were drawn together. I mean, it seems fortuitous. I don't think we chose each other and then, of course, in some way we did.

**Carol:** Do you see the three of you, though, as having some unique complementarities?

**Philip:** It would appear so because we've survived this long. But in the light of what I've just described, it was not because of that that I found myself with these two women, consciously. At the time, in 1982, I would have been associated with very radical separatist

feminist women. I don't think that that is the way that Nollaig and Imelda would have seen themselves. And yes, I was drawn to them as strong, powerful women with whom I wanted to be associated.

**Carol:** What I was so impressed with was the integrity with which you all seemed to function in relation to re-



specting life and the human spirit. I felt that you worked together in a *balanced* intuitive synchrony. Is there something that's happened to have brought that together?

**Imelda:** I think we go through phases: fighting phases, spiritual phases, synchronous phases, twosome phases, and singular phases.

**Philip:** The dignity or the respect for dignity I think is balanced by scandalous and outrageous disrespect. I mean, the two have to be [oscillating implicitly].

**Carol:** There's the liberalness or the autonomy to relate dynamically.

**Philip:** We can be nasty, I think, as well as respectful. I think that's what I'm trying to say.

**Imelda:** You were talking about openness. I actually think none of us are open. I think our hallmark is actually a little closure. We're extremely protective. I think because of that, we have to strive to be more open.

**Carol:** When I was thinking of openness, I was thinking of the invitation for openness in the family to tell their story. Because my sense was that as much as all the ways of explaining your work cognitively, you could also explain your work spiritually in that you facili-

tated, in manner or approach, the *respect* of the person and/or family by *extraordinary listening* to the *voice* of the story. Do you think I'm misperceiving?

**Imelda:** No, I think maybe that's a very strong desire. And I think the three of us help each other in that. We keep that desire alive in each other, the others check on it. I don't know if I'm saying that right.

**Philip:** What occurs to me is that the spiritual is just one step away--that somehow in the mainstream clinical domain--we just don't access that simple step. I don't agree to anything terribly incredible, but by making that simple step, we seem to do something which I think is available to all clinicians or to all therapists. It's no huge leap that we make, in the way that you defined it. Just in making space for people to tell their story has a spiritual dimension, you just need to incorporate that way of describing it or thinking about

it. It's not a *sea* change to some other place. It's a relatively marginal shift. Maybe we just give it an emphasis.

**Nollaig:** Just to connect that with the protective thing that Imelda was talking about--I think that when Imelda talks about a closure--it's an experience that we have in our relationship as a team. But with this metaphor of openness, I think what we attempt to do is convince ourselves that this is a safe place for that story to be told. So, therefore, we have to contract with each other, perhaps implicitly, that we will treat the story very precious. And sometimes that may be that "No! We shouldn't hear that story!" because we can't treat it precious. So, our open space is always, are we ready? Are we ready to hear this story? Are we in a good situation ourselves to hear this? And if we're not in a good situation, we say "No! We can't hear this story!" And that may seem like a door has been closed, but that's the position we take, because we would have the experience ourselves, and we would caution each other about where to say *what*. So I think it has to do with this emphasis on protection. Maybe we can just say a little bit about that to help you under-



stand better. Jane was a colleague and a trainee in the Family Therapy Project at Mater Misericordiae Hospital. I was her supervisor and she was on the same team as Philip. Her story was being half-told in lots of places, but nobody was *politically* in a position to deal with it. Yet, she possibly had a desire to lay it out with one person but nobody was free to hear it because she was a member of staff. She eventually had a therapist herself that she really didn't want--she was sent there as-it-were because she wasn't getting better. She was depressed and not into much. And when Jane died, we just became so frightened that abuse had happened somewhere in regard to how we were to her as colleagues and friends, not just us, but all the department. And that's why the emphasis on the *Children of Lir*, that's actually what we did after her death. We really dispersed for a long time and then we came back in kind of a huddle. Although we're not open in the usual sense, whatever issue comes up for us personally--if, for instance, we feel it's stopping us, we declare it.

**Imelda:** I think it's probably true to say that we're pretty much very open with ourselves.

**Phillip:** Yes.

**Nollaig:** We declare things in the team and we ask each other things that doesn't happen in any other relationship.

**Carol:** I was wondering if you had considered, though, the knowledge you gained from grieving Jane's death as unique knowledge for a team?--that you work together perhaps uniquely and that some of your therapeutic success comes from how you do work together as much as how you explain your work?

**Phillip:** We consistently get feedback about how we are together. People who attend our workshops simply comment on our interaction, not on the content of what we presented. So, yeah, there's something going on there that people find warming, or freeing, or reassuring.

**Nollaig:** There are very significant differences in the team in regard to talents and I think that that makes for a very strong team, but also makes for, at times, big imbalances. Like I do think that we wouldn't be in this kind of place with someone like you asking us

about ourselves if it wasn't for Imelda, in some ways. Because she's extremely courageous. In all sorts of situations she challenges. She's very tenacious, she'll hold on to the movement, she'll fight for it. She'll fight for her own position but she fights on behalf of the team as well. She's very assertive. In that sense, very infuriating, because she can fill up all the space. So in that moment, you're oppressed by that. But it's knowing that in the history that that space has to be filled by her for now. I think that absolutely, Philip, that you are this clear glass of water and that you can see things, these kind of social segregations in such a clear way. I think it's helpful, that's good! And I think what I do best in the team is that I am a constancy in the team.

**Imelda:** But you do more than that. You're more than just a constancy. I mean, you are that, but you're also the one that pulls a lot of the strands together in the moment. You're kind of a leader--as well as a constancy.

...

**Karl:** Before you move on though, I'm just wondering whether Nollaig and Imelda would like to respond to your initial question, because they didn't really. I'm curious about that. I mean, what some of your major life experiences were that predisposed you to the kind of work you're doing now?

**Imelda:** It's a funny thing. I've always been actively involved in some area of child abuse. Through the 70s I was involved in campaigns around non-accidental injury, and started with some other people a national campaign, which I shudder at the thought of now. We were advocating forcible entry--a complete paradox--and so I think this is an attempt to correct some of that.

**Karl:** How did you get to the point where you decided you wanted to correct this?

**Imelda:** When I began to see the monster I'd released in print--out there--and the shape it was taking. I think I began to see that that wasn't really the direction I wanted to take.

**Carol:** How did you see yourself as--woman and your own strength in that, in relation to the society and to men, during that time?

**Imelda:** Well, that's gone through major shifts. I mean, I was reared as a boy by my father, I was my father's son. Rath-

er than be given dolls, I was given footballs and various things--I was a "tom boy." I never thought of myself particularly as being something less than any man. It wasn't until a conversation I had in 1984 with Harriet Lerner when I was saying that I really never suffered any prejudice as a woman and I thought that everything was all open and possible for me. She kind of patted me on the head and said, "I thought like you one time dear!" I remember being very angry at that statement, thinking that she was patronizing. Yet now it's probably been the most important statement. She was absolutely right! There were all sorts of prejudices that I didn't decode or see which I began to see subsequently--based on my experience a few years beforehand, where in my career I had been asked to do something but was told that it wouldn't get any recognition. The reason that it wouldn't get any recognition was because I was a social worker *and* I was a woman. I mean, that was the implicit message. And that remark took a long time to percolate through. But I think that remark turned me around dramatically.

**Karl:** Where did you derive the courage that Nollaig talked about?

**Imelda:** My father says I arrived into the world *screaming*. I don't know. I wouldn't see myself as a courageous person.

**Nollaig:** But you are. You're very courageous.

**Imelda:** I don't know. Well, there may be something in the relationship that I had with my father. I had quite a close relationship with my mother right through me teens and it wasn't until I got to me late adolescence that our relationship got a bit difficult. My father--I always absolutely believed that he loved me and no matter what I did he would always love me and that he always adored me, but he was extremely strict. I used to be so angry with him. And that went on for a long number of years when I would fight him on every conceivable issue. I think it was that I knew that no matter what I did he would always love me and that it would never disrupt our relationship. And I suppose it's part of the joking between us. I have this unerring belief--it has worked out pretty much for me, that it will be okay.



**Karl:** Sounds like you've been in continuous *protest training*. You're so schooled in it that for you it's so easy, so natural; where for most women, it's very difficult because they've been hit so hard when they try to protest. And I agree with you, having the confidence in your father's love probably made it safer for you to protest and develop that strength, which other people see as courage.

**Imelda:** I had a lot of support from my mother as well.

**Karl:** But what was it that brought you to the point where you adopted this stance of being so sensitive? Because you don't come across as a *gang buster*. You do come across as having that potential. When you were asking questions shown on the tape, clearly the questions you were asking, in my view, were questions that would tend to minimize the possibility of negative violence, in the sense that you were trying to open space for less violence to take place by saying violent things so that they didn't have to be acted upon. And that, to me, reveals a commitment to non-violence.

**Nollaig:** I think that one of the great things that has happened in Imelda's life was that she truly has parents who adored her, loved her, and admired her. The other thing is that Imelda just had one sister who died when Imelda was 19, and this little girl was 11 or 12. I think that that was a very extraordinary experience in the family because all Imelda's strength had to come out then, to deal with that. So she had to be several people for her parents. And from that, I think, Imelda has a belief that friends will never abandon her so when she says she's a closed person, she will actually take a relationship as far as it can go, if it's important to her, to test it out. So she has great trust, quite extraordinary trust and she falls on her face or her backside or whatever it is, but she always takes the risk.

**Karl (to Nollaig):** The question is what were your turning points? Or what were critical events in your life that left you doing the kind of work you're doing now? You certainly seem to be approaching individuals and families with a sense of profound respect and acceptance while at the same time bringing something to the situation that they don't have. More specifically, what is

the base of your own particular uniqueness, in terms of contributions you have made to this group?

**Nollaig:** I mean, I could describe some things in my life when I could justify something, but I would say predominantly, I think that it stays this way, I have never had a plan for my life and I still don't.

**Karl:** Could I ask it a different way? Given that, like you mentioned the other day, you were raised in a way that you were not entitled to claim things for yourself...if we asked you to give credit to others and events that have significantly influenced you in your life--what would you pick out?

**Nollaig:** It was always trying to establish for myself whether I was loved or not. That eases over time. I think that's to do with my position in my family. I was the second oldest of seven children. I had this very intelligent, talented, beautiful, older sister, I was born 13 months later and then my brother was born 15 months after that, in a family that very much valued having a son. We lived on a small farm, and so I was in the middle. And from a very early stage, I knew my place. I think that's a big difference between Imelda and myself, that she came clearly into the world screaming and these people were there for her. I don't mean not to acknowledge my own parents, but it's just to say about that. And so I don't know in terms of my personal or professional life whether I have been able to make that issue a resource or not.

**Carol:** Would that experience have prepared you to your special place here as the one providing *constancy*.

**Imelda:** It's a very interesting idea, actually, because you're caught between the oldest son and oldest daughter.

**Karl:** Actually, when you described that, it just makes so much sense to me how that position energized you to do things to be appreciated, even though you always doubted whether you were appreciated. It created a very giving person! You're the kind of person who gives continuously and the giving is appreciated very, very strongly. But the doubt that it's not appreciated is what keeps you giving. It's a very powerful source of energy to me. So I think you have, in fact, used it as a resource even though, I'm sure it's been a burden at times too.

**Nollaig (to Imelda):** If you have the virtue of courage, I have the virtue of fortitude. It's something that maybe can be a very negative thing, that I can *endure* situations. Imelda has the courage to face it. And you, Philip, certainly, are the priest of it. You bless it in some way. You provide the blessing!

**Carol:** I have thought of the *three gunas* represented in Hindu scriptures: Brahmha, the creator; Rajas, the maintainer; and Shiva, the destroyer. The destroyer is considered the most powerful in lots of ways because anything that stays the same too long must be destroyed to foster new creation. So they are constantly in balance with one another. One isn't good or bad to the other. It's really interesting. You seem to have a wonderful *balance*.

**Karl:** One thing I respect about your team is that it seems that you would be so respectful of others that you would want other therapeutic teams to create their own unique complementarities and that you would not intend your particular way of working together as a *model* for people to follow.

**Carol:** Even so, natural occurrences are often so surprising that when under close scrutiny--pattern can be observed. Although other therapy teams may never truly replicate the Irish Team, a lot can be gained from a consideration of their reciprocities and their profound vitality.

**Nollaig:** I think in a highly individualistic world and in professional life that emphasizes achievement and hierarchy, I would hope that we could make a contribution and would be remembered for the different kind of creativity that can emerge from *community*. We think of ourselves as a community. And if I think of myself, so I could say I might have this talent or that talent, I don't think that I would be able to create anything, I mean of course I could create something, but I think that our community effort makes for something that's creative. Therefore, I can't respond individually to the question [about my individual contribution]. I think *that*, by living in the team as we do.

**Karl:** Part of Nollaig's individual contribution is her perspective on the collective, and her commitment to that view, which of course, is consistent with her position of being a maintenance per-



son.

**Carol:** If there is, though, something in the idea that the whole of this team is "more than the sum of its parts," then it may be very difficult for them to answer individually about individual contributions to the field. They may want to dialogue on what they as a group are contributing to the field. I don't know.

**Imelda:** I think the first thing is that we're always amazed that people seem to like what we do.

**Philip:** I just don't think it's sufficiently well-developed for people to respond as favorably as they do. I think we use actually a very narrow base of case material. I *would* like that we had more to draw on. I think we use it quite imaginatively. We've used different media. I think we could do that an awful lot more.

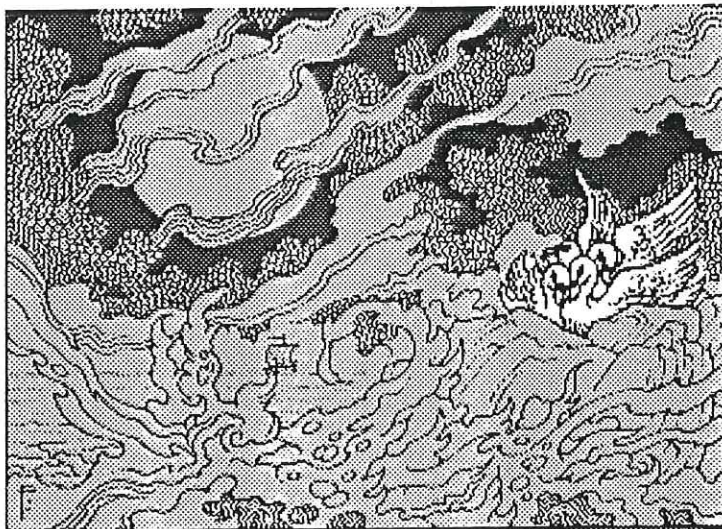
**Philip:** About the question regarding our unique contribution to the field--what occurs to me is that I am not interested in the field of therapy per se. It has just been used as a vehicle. It's perhaps a transitional route to something else--a "spring board." It happened to be an avenue that opened to some vision and it could have been in politics. There could have been another context, but I've been fortunate to meet these fellow travellers that have made the difference. In the other avenues that I've explored, I haven't been able to find kindred spirits of the same quality. And I think it's a good field, it's a good one for us to be operating in.

**Carol:** What might you want to say to all of us who are in the field and who might touch people, what is it that you most want to say?

**Philip:** Maybe we're saying it. I keep thinking it has to be said in some other way, but I did have the sense and the confirmation this evening that we are saying it. And I'm not sure why I keep thinking that it needs to be said some other way or more intensely or more graphically or more powerfully, but yet I still feel that. I mean the kind of response we got from the woman who works with the aboriginal people or

from many people today, was reassuring but I think we tapped into something that they don't themselves acknowledge or own or experience for a lot of their working lives or everyday lives. I suppose I want to increase the component of people's experiences that is of that order so that it is more ideally disseminated. And if the healing world or domain in which we operate is a good vehicle for that, then fine. If it's not, then it's someplace else.

**Karl:** I think you made an eloquent statement about this this morning when you placed that little slivered piece of pie into the context of culture of violence. And clearly you're committed to taking a stand in relation to that *culture of violence* in a global sense and you see the possibilities of developing an understanding and a method, a way of approaching this through this field. And I agree with you entirely in terms of the point you made about how the narrowness of that slice can become seductive in terms of making it easy to project onto the people who occupy it and claiming innocence because we're out-



side of it. I think that's an important thing for you to tell us.

**Philip:** Sure. It's a tremendous frustration for me that I'm not more articulate about that and that I don't write about it or make louder statements about it in different media and that's a continuing frustration for me. I haven't found channels to speak in a louder voice about that. And yet, men speaking in louder voices is something that I'm not very comfortable with so to do

it through this vehicle is just wonderful. And yet, maybe I'd like us then to be louder about it.

**Karl:** But it isn't the loudness that's important, I don't think.

**Philip:** The quality, then, okay.

**Karl:** It's the bringing forth of the distinctions that makes it possible to act.

**Philip:** There's another way in which I feel that the timing is just perfect, is just unfolding as it should and when I'm in my most centered mood, I really believe that.

**Karl:** Timing of what--in terms of your life or the current culture--of what?

**Philip:** Yes. I suppose I mean all of it. That the unfolding is happening as it should and that we will find ways to say what we need to say to more people. And then there are other times when I'm just crazy with frustration.

**Nollaig:** I can't remember--just to come at that issue in another way from a spiritual point of view, there was some saint that was asked by someone--"If you were to know that you were going to die tomorrow, what is it that you would do differently today?" And the

reply is, "Well, if I knew that, I would do exactly today what I've been doing." And so, I would then see, in terms of professional life, that professional life is what I know, is where I'm placed, and that's where I'm situated. And so my thing--the virtue of fortitude and endurance--is to close my eyes to these other places that Philip talks about. That this is, when I think of the team, my place in the team, this is the task the team has undertaken. So that's a kind of constancy.

But that his struggling to move out there can shine/illuminate this place so that it doesn't stand up as... and Imelda cuts out frontiers, she pushes that in a different way to Philip. His is more a restlessness and a frustration and a questioning. Imelda is much more questioning at the immediate frontier of it. So hers is always around these boundaries, what is it that we should shape, change. Is that your experience?

**Imelda:** I suppose I'm the one that asks



the questions--"What kind of an animal this is?"--about what kind of an identity it has and how should we be shaping

work at that *coalface*--the relationship between men and women.

Nollaig: But do you feel you've made a contribution at that *coalface*?

Imelda: Yes, in my practice. I care more about the world of men and women and helping it all together, than I do about therapy. And this thing called therapy is just a vehicle for that. And understanding the history of that relationship because I see it as the fundamental relationship from which all of your abuses stem.

Karl: One thing that I was struck with was how, Nollaig, your position is so typically female. And yours, Philip, is so typically male in terms of the cosmic universal. And Imelda, yours of the

local conditions and local circumstances of those immediate relationships between males and females. And then, of course, because they're so different you need someone to keep it all together and someone that values the social interactional domain as the source of creativity. It certainly is a nice combination that you have stumbled upon. You're very lucky that way.

Imelda: I think my commitment is to the collectivity and the contribution we make is that of our friendship. Because we're not just professional colleagues. I think we're very deep friends. I think if there's a contribution we might make as a team, that I would like to make, it's a contribution in terms of the differences between us but also what we share. I think we do have a deep love for each other.

Nollaig: I see the *team* in a way as *sacred* in the field. So it's not just our personal

journey working out our relationships in the sense that we've attempted to be creative, in this way, and we've invested an awful lot of our lives in it. We've gone this journey so there are other journeys we haven't taken. It's sacred in the sense that if that is a contribution to the field, then we have an obligation to understand our process and to take very good care of it. So I see that we're connected in the field. There are lots of people who have really made us a team. People that we love very much and who have helped us with this. Although we were committed, we possibly might not have done it if those people hadn't given us a vision of a broader field in which we could insert ourselves. So what began as a local team, I see us now as we're local, but on a bigger stage. It is painful if teams fall apart and it's not just private news. So I think we're very, very aware of that. The field is about the notion that there's a way to begin to speak to people who have pain in their lives--in a way that will help them transform their experience--that's what the field is.

Imelda: And in that field, I would want to have men and women live their lives, and adults and children live their lives that can be less abusive all around the place.

Nollaig: But, of course, we have to personalize it and talk about the people who are connected to us, who indicate to us what the field is. So it's a construction, the field.

Philip: But what I'd say about this is that this is family, as close as I can imagine getting to it outside of blood relations. And since the "nuclear family" has ceased to exist or is disappearing in front of us, this in some way is more than what is described as family.

Carol: I would like to thank you for this precious opportunity to share time and conversation with you. It has been a very special experience. Thank you.

Imelda, Nollaig, and Philip: Thank you.

*(Nollaig and Imelda may be contacted through the, Family Therapy Project, Department of Child & Family Psychiatry, Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Dublin 7, Ireland. Philip is at Clanwilliam Institute, 18 Clanwilliam Terrace, Grand Canal Quay, Dublin 2, Ireland.)*

*The legend of the "Children of Lir" can be read in The Children of Lir, written by Michael Scott and illustrated by Jim Fitzpatrick; Methuen Children's Books Ltd, London, 1986.)*

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ourselves, at this point in time?

Karl (to Imelda): What do you see as your major contribution?

Imelda: I was thinking about what Nollaig said that if you were asked--you were going to die tomorrow what would you do differently? And I don't think I would do anything differently and I wouldn't mind dying tomorrow--I feel that I've lived a full life. I don't particularly want to die tomorrow. I would like to see a different relationship between men and women. I'm not so cynical or skeptical about what we call therapy, although I don't like too much of it, the idea of too much of it. I think this is an arena where we can address the very fundamental issue of the relationship between men and women and adults and children. What am I trying to say?

Nollaig: Your contribution to the field.

Imelda: That's where I would want to

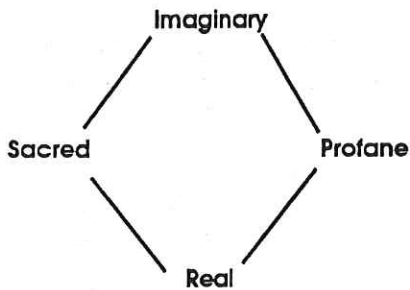


# If the Doors of Perception Were Cleansed

by  
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Family Therapy Program  
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*Surely some revelation is at hand;  
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.  
William Butler Yeats*

In their Fifth Province model, Byrne, McCarthy and Kearney (1990) suggest that human experience is made meaningful within culture by a construction of the world according to two intersecting and interdependent complementarities (Figure 1):



A culture that is performing optimally would be described as one providing appropriate forms of personal and social expression for what I am designating, following Byrne, McCarthy and Kearney, as four primary categories of human experience. The *Sacred*, according to Mircea Eliade (1959, p. 21), refers to those spaces, persons or things that demarcate a break with everyday experience, that "reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation." As such, the Sacred is revealed as the "revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse. The manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world". . . and "reveals an absolute fixed point, a center" (p. 21). The *Profane*, by contrast, Eliade goes on, is a domain in which "space is homogeneous and neutral: no break quantitatively differentiates the various parts of the mass" (p. 22).

By the *Real* I refer to the domain of necessity and limits as understood and believed by a person, group or community. It constitutes the realm beyond which persons believe there is chaos, *no-thing*. As the complement of the Real, the *Imaginary* constitutes the means of expression employed to envision alternate

realities to those that are believed to exist already. Such alternate realities might be viewed as possible, impossible, desirable or undesirable.

They also include the human capacity to project ourselves somewhere that we are not actually present, as in daydreams and, most happily, in empathy with other people.

Accordingly, where there are provided culturally validated outlets for each of these functions, they stand in complementary relationship to their respective opposite numbers and either a supportive or challenging relationship to the categories adjacent to them. Thus, where each are provided distinct and valid languages of expression, the Imaginary would serve the Real by expanding the possibilities of what might otherwise become a world of philistine practicality that would be defined by its limits. The Real, on the other hand, would serve the Imaginary by preventing it from losing itself in dreams and wishes

ungrounded in a reassuring sense of limits. The Sacred would serve the Profane

by investing daily, otherwise mundane events with meaning and also with a sense that some part of life is set off as special and inviolable, that everything is not up for grabs. Yet the Profane would serve the Sacred by providing spaces and places for spontaneous pursuits and personal satisfactions free from the constraining sense that some taboo or other is constantly in danger of being violated.

In the optimally performing culture the

Imaginary and the Sacred might be expected to form a natural alliance and the same pertain between the Real and the Profane. The Imaginary not only supplies the metaphors and stories that keep a sense of the Sacred in the human heart but they keep it from its greatest danger, namely the literalism that otherwise threatens the Sacred with becoming repressive and tyrannical. The Sacred, in





turn, inspires the Imaginary to its highest pinnacles of expression. A sense of what is Real and solid provides the Profane with a sense of a material world that may simply be enjoyed without guilt while the Profane may be said to free human curiosity to explore the nature of the Real unhindered.

When I say that a culture performs optimally when each of these four functions are provided effective and autonomous forms of expression, I mean that appropriate outlets for their expression are found in the institutions of the society and their presence in vital forms are necessary for the personal and interpersonal well-being of its members. Conversely, to the extent that any of these functions is denied such expression by being, for instance, colonized, to use the Irish team's felicitous term, into the service of any of the other functions, the sense of well-being of its members will suffer accordingly. In the remainder of this paper, I will propose that such a process of colonization has taken place, indeed that it has provided much of the driving force in the history of the modern Western world. This process accounts for many of the ills and uncertainties evident in the lives of its people, ills that have given rise to the emergence and the practice of therapy itself, notwithstanding the achievements that the domination of the Real and the Profane have made possible.

### The Conquest

In the modern world the Real and the Profane can be said to have effectively colonized the Sacred and the Imaginary. The first two have become the realms pertaining to the public domain. As such, they constitute the dominant perceptual lens through which men as the managers and definers of reality in the age of patriarchy interpret their experience. Accordingly, men, I suggest, are more likely than women to confuse their fantasies with reality and act them out on the public stage, while women are more likely to be aware of when they are imagining, but to accept this as a failing, since it pertains to a domain defined as private, hence less important. Thus, for instance, when a male feels himself threatened, he might experience compensatory fantasies of power and aggression but altogether confuse his fantasy with reality. If he has a position of power then the world would

stand at the mercy of his acting out, as we have seen in the recent *Gulf War*. When a man experiences himself as having little or no power in the public world, he is apt to express it in the one place where he does, in the private domain, i.e., at home. Women, on the other hand, not having had power, therefore aware that their fantasies are just that, have been readily willing to believe it when a spokesman of patriarchy tells them that they are imagining things when they are in physical or emotional pain.

Therapists also need not, in fact, must not shy away from the Sacred domain in our work with clients for it has much to do with our clients' uncertainties, and even their symptoms. Whether it is specifically denied or its conventional expression paid lip-service--which is but another form of denial--the Sacred will seek and find expression, usually through something highly desired or greatly feared. In contemporary Western society sex has served as such a quasi-holy centre of life for many. It has, probably for more men than women, been defined as a necessity of life, a 'need' rather than simply a strong desire. Thus, when a person in the throes of such a belief is deprived of it, or seeks through it some experience of forbidden ecstasy or dark mystery, he readily finds justification for letting himself be overpowered by it. The phallus and the orgiastic sense of power that its expression offers to confirm can be likened to a secret worshiper who surrenders himself to serve an insatiable god. An attitude very like this may well account for the diverse and perverse forms that the sexual abuse of women and children takes in a world in which the Sacred lacks vehicles for expression appropriate to the power of its role in human life. The Sacred, in a word, will not be denied. If not given its necessary place socially it will find it, through the twists and turns of a profaned rather than a sacralized imagination.

### The Sacred Loses Its Place

The modern age, might be described as having made a determined attempt to marginalize or colonize the Sacred domain. It would remain acceptable as a matter of personal taste but, beyond being called upon in times of crisis to bring God onside, so to speak, it had become a troublesome intrusion where the agenda of the public domain was concerned. Its

relegation to the private domain of personal taste was part of a process that had been going on since at least the high Renaissance. This attitude is much in evidence in the writings of Machiavelli (1469-1527), for instance, but it began to be pursued with a vengeance in the aftermath of the destruction wrought by the Wars of Religion that followed the Protestant Reformation. The consolidation of the latter represented the beginnings of the attempt to operate an entire society on the basis of religious pluralism. The solution was essentially the privatization of the Sacred domain.

Religion was relegated to the realm of personal taste and rather forcibly removed from the public domain not only because of its already well-demonstrated capacity for inciting divisiveness. An expansion of the profane sense of the homogeneity of places and things provided a vast sense of freedom for the exploration and exploitation of the natural world. To this end, however, the ideology of Protestantism tended to further desacralize nature, and paradoxically, to also sacralize a person's worldly position as a vocation or calling very like holy orders themselves. Earlier, Luther's horrified call to the secular princes of the German states to crush the Peasant's Revolt in the name of God had seemed to place the Lord himself in debt to the secular state. Everything, in short, was in place for the effective colonization of the Sacred by those allied to the domination of the increasingly powerful alliance of the Profane and the Real.

In the meantime, the more or less natural alliance suggested above between the Imaginary and the Sacred, which had inspired the great cathedrals of the high Middle Ages, had begun separating during the Renaissance when artists began to draw upon more profane subject matter for their work. The emergence of Protestantism, moreover, brought with it an indifference if not an active suspicion of the senses as well as of the imagination, favoring instead the letter and an attitude of what Max Weber referred to as worldly asceticism in its expression of the Sacred. In both its dominant forms, Protestantism instituted policies that had the effect of virtually sacralizing *statecraft*: Calvinism by the high importance it ascribed to its ideal of a Christian commonwealth and Lutheranism by its subscription to the doctrine of the state as



God's "left hand." This combination of its theologies of the state and worldly asceticism made the Sacred, once divorced from the vitality and richness provided by its natural alliance with the Imaginary, a ready servant of the material interests of the Real in the form of state imperialism, economics and technology.

### The Colonization Of The Imaginary

The Imaginary, having sought its expression more and more in the Profane realm, began to find itself readily colonized as but a diversion, entertainment and adornment in the business of a society more intent on economic expansion than artistic expression. Thus did the artistic community, the cultural custodians of the Imaginary, restricted, primarily, to entertaining and enlightening the aristocracy begin also to develop as an increasingly autonomous enclave that inspired themselves but only confused and amused the majority even of educated people. Once, however, the middle class became the dominant force in Western society and

began to accumulate the wealth hitherto only known to princes, attention to the arts became the privilege and the responsibility of women, those already thoroughly colonized guardians of most things pertaining to the private sphere, not only home, children and family generally but religion and now the arts.

It remained largely in the popular arts that the Imaginary function continued to have the kind of influence on society as a whole that it had had traditionally. Now, however, the Imaginary served the expansion of the Profane instead of inspiring the Sacred, doing so primarily through popular novels, music and, even-

tually, on a truly mythic scale by the movies, as well as by radio and television. The larger-than-life dimensions of the movie screen made its characters and stories the great cultural exemplars for the previously neglected masses who were now seeking their places in a world of expanding material opportunity. The colonized status of the Imaginary, however, is exemplified by the role of popular culture as entertainment and distraction from life in the Real world, creating and then reinforcing cultural and gender stereotypes of the images valued in a society geared toward productivity, economic well-being and a readiness to

commit violence in the interests of the state and its continuing capacity to pursue its material interests.

### Modernism: An Abortive Revolt

Mind you, a force for human expression as fundamental as the Imaginary can never be entirely brought under control. In their newly almost completely secularized form the arts had flourished magnificently. Indeed they can be said to have been in the van-

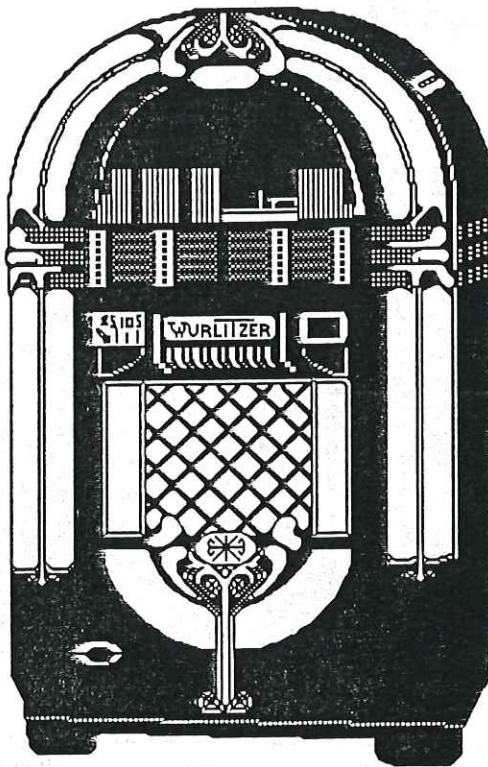
guard of those forces bringing about the victory, as it were, of the Profane over the Sacred. This was especially the case during the Italian Renaissance when, for a time, the artist reigned supreme. The movement known as modernism also represented a situation in which the arts can be said to have capitalized on a kind of autonomy they had been given by virtue of no longer being regarded as enough of a challenge to the prevailing economic business of the society to be worried about. Within their world, art, however profane its subject matter, was still regarded as the most powerful expression of the Sacred in the modern

world. Its affirmation of life and the centrality of love as truth and beauty as, for instance, in the work of such modernists as James Joyce, Thomas Mann and T.S. Eliot profoundly addressed issues of meaning in what was seeming to be an otherwise meaningless world, dominated by the interests of the market place and the inexorable advances of technology. Joyce's Stephen Dedalus asks the ghost of his mother, "What is the word, mother, if you now know it, word known to all men?" (1958, p. 474). He had already answered the question earlier himself, "Love, word known to all men" (p. 161).

Such messages were lost on the majority in the modern world. Not only were most swept up in the promises of progress offered by its new myths, economics and technology, but the very challenge to the complacency and superficiality of the triumphant middle class that modernism represented also involved challenges in style which rendered most of its great work beyond either the interest or the comprehension of those being challenged. In the failure of modernism, then, to bring the resources of the Imaginary domain to bear to the culture at large, both as a challenge and a resource, this vital domain remained largely in its colonial state, providing entertainment and distraction that, instead reinforced the hold that the alliance of the Real and the Profane had on the agenda of Western society.

### The Imaginary Rises Again

If the powerful challenge of modernism could be said to have virtually rendered itself unable to address those whom it sought to challenge, another spokesman of modernism did. Sigmund Freud's invention of psychoanalysis and the subsequent development of psychotherapy as a major cultural phenomenon seemed to address an inner emptiness people were left with in the wake of modernity's almost exclusive focus on controlling the external world. The effective colonization of the Sacred and the Imaginary had given rise to a world that, lacking a sense of meaning and direction that a sacred centre provides, or a guiding myth that appeals to and organizes the imagination, placed all its faith and hope in worldly success and material comfort. When a sense of emptiness followed upon the achievement of these, an unfocused imagination and spiritual





weightlessness offered little to the unfed inner life. Indeed, anything deemed as an undue reliance on the imagination or on questions of meaning was often itself seen as pathological by the psychiatrist and the therapist, the new guardians of the threshold between reality and unreality.

Freud initially represented a major challenge to the prevailing order of things through a science of the imagination that warned of the danger to the soul of the censorship of desire. He furthermore rediscovered the healing power of story-telling, that pre-eminent capacity of the Imaginary, at a time when the latter had been thoroughly colonized as a kind of vacationland of the soul. Psychoanalysis, however, all-too-quickly stepped back from its own revolutionary implications and joined the establishment, becoming but a rather elitist school of psychiatric medicine while behind the scenes, like

the church fathers of old, its exponents anathematized one another over doctrinal differences. Analysts and therapists became virtually the priesthood of the profane order of things, confessors to the spiritually adrift, whose role was essentially to enable their flocks to adjust themselves more happily to a world in which the alliance between the Real and the Profane offered people an economic mythology and a religion of progress as sufficient for the good life. Those who found these insufficient and sought some elusive more, or else could not adapt themselves would be given a pathologizing label and could find someone to whom to confess their illness in order to be absolved and pronounced normal.

### The Liberation

Try as therapists might to act as liberators of the soul rather than as its colonial administrators, we are bound to the latter role as long as we continue to assume that questions of transcendent meaning are none of our business and that therapists are experts on how to adapt to the Real rather than what I suggest we really are, mythologists who pre-eminently serve the Imaginary and point to the Sacred. Since, it is the Imaginary that provides the metaphors and myths that help to personify the Sacred, the therapist as mythologist cannot but ad-



dress the latter domain. And must, for when the Sacred is either ignored or effectively colonized in such a way as to serve rather than challenge prevailing notions of the Real people are left to make their way in the world without any reference point beyond expediency or social pressure. They are apt to act without any clear sense of where they can, should or even have the right to impose limits, either on themselves or others. Thus their sense of the Real itself becomes thrown into question. Their lives not only lack direction, which a vital sense of the Sacred provides, but they lack meaningful or enduring boundaries. Anything goes. All is Profane: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world; / . . . The best

lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity" (1962, p. 99f.).

Meaning is vital, moreover, not only because it provides direction but because, as Paul Ricoeur (1965) suggests, it is the primary human resource that takes us beyond the fallibility of personal or tribal perspective and allows us to view things from a timeless and universal perspective. Indeed, Eliade's definition of the sacred centre, described above, refers to the age-old human quest for that central vantage point from which we can see all things as with the eye of

the Most Holy. Most such efforts, alas, have tended to confuse the tribal perspective with the universal. It is probably, in fact, the diminishment of the Sacred that this confusion has wrought that has finally culminated in the post-modern insistence that we adapt ourselves to a universe in which there simply is no such thing as a central vantage point. Yet we are bound to continue the

quest, as most post-modern fiction acknowledges. Where then ought we to look? To the resources of the Imaginary and the universalizing power of story-telling and, I suggest, story-connecting.

The Imaginary stands as the crown of this diamond mandala. It is the realm of inspiration, vision and the expansion of possibilities. It provides the myths and metaphors that humanizes the centre that the Sacred seeks, it puts heart into the Profane and allows everyday events to be given personal significance while its capacity to envision alternate possibilities prevents the Real from becoming oppressive. Probably no one has spoken more powerfully or accurately on behalf of the imagination than William Blake:



Then I asked: 'Does a firm persuasion (sic) that a thing is so make it so?'

He replied: 'All poets believe that it does, and in ages of imagination this firm persuasion removed mountains; but many are not capable of a firm persuasion of anything.' (1958, p. 99)

The recovery today of the power of the story to transform people's lives brings the Imaginary back into its proper place as an autonomous domain in contemporary culture. Because it lies within the capacity of a good story to induce the willing suspension of disbelief, new stories, as vehicles of the Imaginary bring with them the power to challenge and push back our definitions of the Real whenever they become unduly constraining. The challenging power of a new story, in fact, lies in its capacity to enable us to realize that any definition of the Real is but an old story that is no longer questioned. It has, in short, become a myth.

The recovery, for instance, of a forgotten experience, or the addition of a new experience forces the reconstellation of a prevailing pattern of experiences into a new one which brings with it a new belief about oneself. In short, every new experience challenges an old story and thereby requires its re-vision into a new story. This, then, is the work of therapy, remembering experiences either forgotten or described according to someone else's perception of them, and encouraging ventures into brand new experiences, both of which of which require the re-visioning of the story, hence the redefinition of the Real by the power of the Imaginary.

But the power of the story may also offer inspiration to the Sacred realm as well. As I have indicated elsewhere (1991, 1990) we give our lives meaning as well as personal significance by the larger stories to which we decide to connect our personal and family stories as well as by the manner according to which we connect them. Our actions, for instance, either confirm the prevailing stories of one's community, society, gender, ethnic heritage, even of the human race, the planet Earth and, if we will, the universe itself. The prevailing stories of community, societies and civilization are usually called history and the rest part of something called prehistory or science. As such, they tend to be given objective or actual status as part of the Real. As

constructs of the human imagination, however, they may be recognized as stories in which we play our roles, either to support or challenge the prevailing stories. To the extent that we join our personal and family stories to the prevailing stories that constitute history we resign ourselves to the imperialism of the Real and its continuing colonization of the Sacred. To the degree, however, that we connect our own stories to those stories that challenge us toward a new humanity and an ever-renewed planet Earth we participate in nothing less than the liberation of the Sacred and the renewal of its quest to be able to perceive from that, viewpoint whose circumference is nowhere and whose centre is everywhere.

As centres of awareness capable of initiating actions that influence each others as well as the larger stories, we have it within each of us to so author our actions that we advance those larger stories by the ways we choose to direct our own stories. This, I suggest, is a legitimate task of therapy, understood in James Hillman's term, soul-making, or, as I am proposing, story-connecting. As such it, re-introduces the dimension of meaning and with it the Sacred as part of the rightful domain of therapy. With it our personal stories may be authored according to decisions we make. Our most profane daily actions thereby become vehicles of the Sacred, understood as every action that furthers our larger stories toward the direction of a *new humanity of new women, new men* aware of ourselves as the consciousness of our Mother, the Earth and of whatever role her story is to play in the story of the Universe.

### Standing At The Doors

As therapists, our place is by the very doors of perception, our vocation to open those doors to liberate the resources of the Imaginary and the Sacred that have been held captive in this society for many centuries, that they may be made available to questing souls who have found themselves constrained by the false gods of the Real and adrift in a world that offers them "no direction home." For, as Blake reminds us:

*If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.*

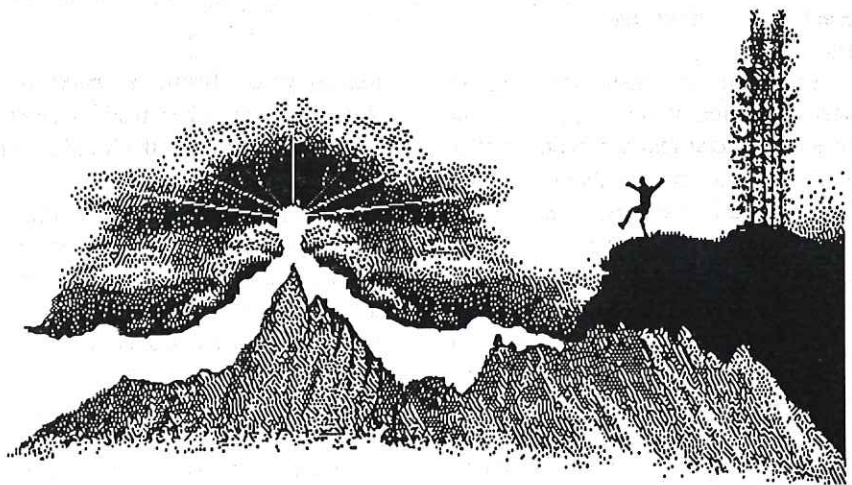
*For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.*

[Ed. Alan would like to express his appreciation to Philip Kearney for his generous encouragement to write about these ideas.]

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# A Good Man is Hard to Find

by  
Jon Amundson, Ph.D.  
Alan Parry, Ph.D.

*Gentlemen, the one question I have been unable to answer is 'what is it women want?'*

*Sigmund Freud*

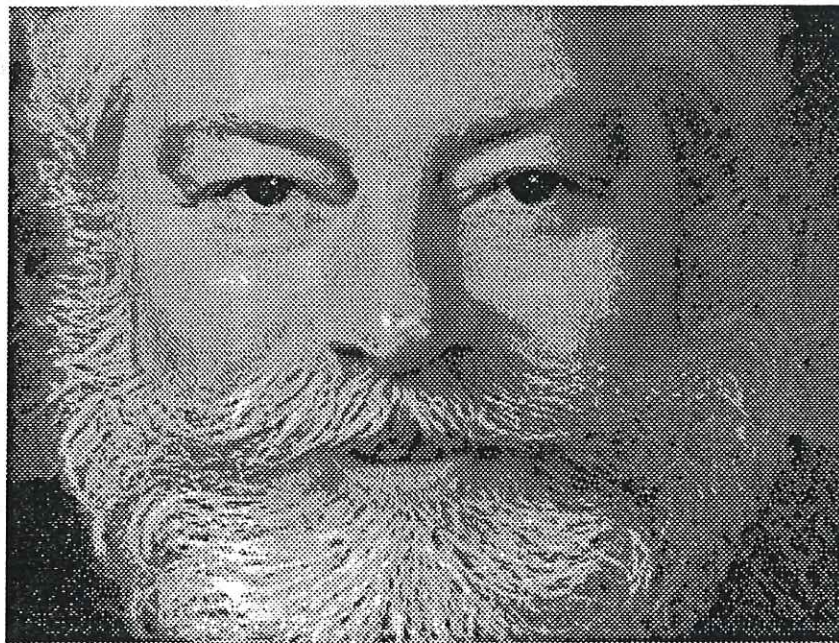
Freud asks the question patriarchy places upon the lips of men when faced with the feminist critique. Indeed, it is probably the question that representatives of the prevailing order of things ask whenever they are confronted by members of a marginalized group who would challenge that order. It invariably bespeaks both honest inquiry (accompanied by sincere bewilderment) and an attempt to reduce the complexity of this issue to brief disposal through specification and containment. The implication within the question itself is that, if women have any case at all, they should be able to make it simple. Men's view that women make their case complexly, only proves to men what they supposedly have *always known* about *the fair sex*, namely that *they do not even know their own minds*. At the same time, the question "What do they want?", with the "keep it simple" implication, might, we imagine, only reinforce, for women, their conviction that men are not really interested in a serious answer.

But there are men, some of us protest, who really do want to know *what women want* and we even want to help make it possible for them to obtain it. "What of us?" we *good men* cry out! AT the one-day workshop, "Feminism and systemic Practice," led by Virginia Goldner in November 1990, one woman asked the obvious question, "Where are the men?" To say that a lively debate ensued would be understating the case in the extreme. The attempts to answer suggested that the question, if not its intent, may have been as facile as Freud's original question, for a comprehensive an-

swer would wind up addressing the same issue he had: the relationship between the sexes in a patriarchal social order. The ratio of men to women in attendance (four to seventy, respectively) suggests that while feminist women are willing to provide forthright response to Freud's question men may be stuck with another dilemma--"Do we really want to hear the answers?"

## Polarities and Polemics

As mentioned above, Freud's question has been asked by beneficiaries of the prevailing order whenever a margi-



nalized group begins to *make trouble*. Where his question reads *women*, we have only to fill in the words *Negroes* (later *Blacks*), *Indians*, *gays*, *Quebec*, *etc.*, the list could go on and on. In the 1960s, I (Amundson) worked in desegregation. This initially involved learning to appreciate the nature of the injustice and inequity that sponsored the need for change and then finding a place for each of us in the task of contributing toward that process. One aspect of this was the encounter, not only with racism *out there*, but one's own experience, even participation, in it--*in here*. To do this, a

dialogue was required that was at times uncertain and often painful. I recall spending three days in a multi-ethnic encounter group, all of us linked by a commitment to the project of integration. I found myself repeatedly subjected to anger and vilification by persons of color. My initial response was of anger and indignation for, was my very presence there not sufficient evidence of my credentials as a person determined, like them, to eliminate all vestiges of racism?

At one session a white co-worker very sincerely asked how he could help?

Could the people of color there give him some ideas? The reply was as scornful as it was brutal. "You could give me your wallet?" "You got a good-looking wife? Would she sleep with a nigger?" He was humiliated into silence. But in their very derision lay his answer. All he could do and all that was expected of him was to listen. Listen, not to lectures on the evils of racism, nor even to the angry rhetoric and maxims of political movements, but to the rage, hurt and pain of their humiliation; listen, not with

the condescending benevolence that says, "How can I help?" but with the openness and humility of silence. He listened and stayed.

When faced with *angry* women, men whose consciences are touched often create for themselves a false dichotomy: there are those men whose actions and attitudes perpetuate patriarchy and feminists who attack it as their historic oppressor. In our eagerness to make it clear that we are not *those* kind of men, we hasten to align ourselves--as indeed we may have done in the past--with the oppressed. We may even confess our



own patriarchal sins and seek absolution by showing the stigmata we bear in the form of our sensitivity and sympathy. We may blush with a certain pleased embarrassment when feminist single us out as *good men*. In the same way that a distinguished and privileged white scientist could say to an audience of mostly non-whites, skin colour is "really just a matter of degree." We can say, from our positions of privilege, supplemented by our well-known sensitivity, the same thing about gender differences. Meanwhile, the issue has been disposed of. We know whose side we are on.

For a male, to be a *good man* is not a bad position to be in. We get to have the best of both worlds, all the privileges that go with being a man together with the moral superiority that goes with supporting oppressed women. Why, then, do we need to go to a conference on women's issues, even if it is open to men? After all, some of us are sensitive enough not to impose on women's space even when invited; we already know where we stand and what the issues are so there is no point, surely, in taking more time from our busy careers to go to another workshop to hear things we know in advance that we agree with; and besides, at a woman's conference--there might be one of those radical feminists who *have it in for all men* and might lump me in with patriarchal men, I who, by being there, would surely be more deserving of appreciation--as one of the *good men*.

When a man does the dishes or cares for the children he is generally rewarded, by his wife, by other women, and by himself: *one small step for a man, one giant step for equality*. If a man goes to a conference on women's issues surely he is taking an even larger step as he basks in the approbation of the women who comment on his attendance.

### The Way Out/ Another Way In

The role of a *good father* is a temptation for men who benevolently extend themselves on behalf of women. Such men graciously and genuinely seek to join in the battle against patriarchy by listening to and helping its victims. In the name of a fervent belief in gender partnership, they present themselves as the kind of men many women wish their husbands were and wanted their father to have been. It is merely stating the obvious to point out that no group is more at

risk for falling into this role, however unwittingly or unwillingly than male therapists of pro-feminist. In taking arms against the iron fist of patriarchy we may be in the process of covering it in a velvet glove. Virginia Goldner addressed this phenomenon when she described the all-but universal experience for women, "whose hearts go out to the man carrying the baby in the snuggly."

The danger of *good men* extending rather than ending patriarchy by becoming *good fathers* may lie behind the refusal of many feminists to grant to their male supporters the right to call themselves feminists. They probably recognize that the enthusiasm of such men to join the cause is in order to lead it. Moreover, the reluctance of many women to see a male therapist may have less to do with the possibility that *men don't understand* than sensing that the more understanding he demonstrates, the more he implicitly takes on the role of the *good father* to her *hurt child*. In William Styron's account of a violent slave rebellion in the Deep South, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, the latter selects as his first victim, not one of the cruel taskmasters, but a young white woman who had befriended and aided him. It was, he said, not cruelty that perpetuated servitude but the small kindnesses that made it tolerable.

When *good fathers* accustomed to being rewarded for their benevolence are, instead, lumped in with the oppressors of patriarchy, how great then is our indignation and our confusion! We have staked our claim, we have stated our position. Yet we, of all men, are the ones criticized. "No wonder," we may mutter, "men don't come to these things. Look at the thanks we get!" Hell hath no fury like a *good man* spurned! We may even remember that oppressed people who have found their voice have never been noted for their politeness, but somehow we had hoped women would be different. "Sure they have a beef against patriarchal men--so do we--but doesn't our very being here show that we are different? This is very bad form!"

Man's indignation and confusion, we suggest, reflects aspects of the relationship between men and women that contain both the important similarities and peculiar differences between men and women *and* other historical conflicts between the privileged and the marginal-

ized. Similarities pertain to the argument that patriarchy, the domination of men over women, is the beginning of all subsequent master-slave divisions, the *Fail of man*, if you will. The differences that make this issue so complicated have to do with the unique degree of intimacy that necessarily exists between men and women, as well as the psychosocial division of labor that has been all but universalized, as a result. Other oppressed and colonized peoples have been put into positions of servitude involving their masters in varying degrees of intimacy, but women are the only oppressed group who sleep with their master--as the very means by which human society is created and perpetuated. In their historic role within that arrangement, women, as both child-bearers as well as the less powerful, have assumed roles of both nurturers, due to the former, and conciliators, due to the latter.

Accordingly, when women exhibit forcefulness or anger, especially in the service of challenging and unmasking the holders of prevailing privilege--be they patriarchs, good men, or good fathers--they are making a political statement simply by departing from the role assigned to them by men (i.e., to be nurturant, to be conciliatory, etc.). We suggest that the reaction of men generally, and we *good men* in particular, exposes the fragility of our pro-feminist position. A woman's anger challenges us as to how far we are willing to go to put our ears where our mouths have been.

### Her Story and His Story

Anger, however, cannot be the last word between men and women. All but an extreme minority acknowledge that. Certainly women have much to be angry about yet, and men should not be altogether condemned for hoping that women will set some of this anger aside to make it easier for them to listen. Women, however, should continue to react angrily to requests that they stay in their familiar roles as conciliators and comforters. *And*, men must be forgiven for their confusion and uncertainty as to how to proceed in this current *no man's land*. Confusion concerning what to do is as uncomfortable for men, used to setting the agenda, as anger is for women used to appeasing dominating men.

These are times, it seems, when good men find themselves living without



a perch, trying to disengage ourselves from patriarchal assumptions and actions while seeking to support feminism, even perhaps resisting our usual itch if not to lead the charge at least to offer some recommendations about how to do it better. Instead of standing around awkwardly wondering about where and how we fit into the feminist movement, whether we can join the struggle or merely act as its cheerleaders, perhaps the best thing good men can do for women is to look at ourselves. As long as we confine ourselves to wondering what we can do for women we are condemned to the role of the *good father* and its insidious perpetuation of patriarchy.

To escape the tyranny of patriarchy we *good men* will have to go beyond congratulating ourselves and basking in the approval of women for being those few exceptions to the rule. The issue, after all, is not whether men are good or bad anymore than it is whether women are nice or nasty. Whenever anyone agrees that the struggle is about patriarchy, the rule of the fathers, are we not saying that, in the final analysis, it is the rule of anybody over anybody else that is the fundamental problem? In that case,

our challenge as men is to begin in earnest to prepare ourselves for what it will mean for us, as well as for women, to live in a world of free women and free men.

We say women and men rather than human beings advisedly, for every person experiences the world from one perspective or the other because each is so perceived and dealt with by others. Moreover, we are inescapably male or female because we exist in history, which is, in effect, the story of patriarchy, his/story. None of us can simply walk away from that legacy, neither women in their colonial existence, nor men in their privilege. We will escape such an inequitable fate, not by denying the importance of gender, but as each man and each woman disconnects his/her personal stories from that of patriarchy and connects them instead to one or the other of the liberating stories about women who empower themselves and men who relinquish such power so that men and women may live in partnership.

Women have thus far taken the lead. They are finding their own voices, voices that had been shouted into silence by the clamour of history. Silence, how-

ever, forms a crucible for emotions which, once given voice, can be forged into a story that empowers and inspires. Perhaps the silence of men would, if given voice, speak of the wounds we have hidden from ourselves and certainly from each other while struggling to maintain the great pretense that men are decreed to have dominion over the Earth. Soon it may be time for us to tell each other our stories of how we got our wounds. One day we will want to tell them to women and we hope they will listen. In the meantime, while we struggle to find *our* silenced voices, we can make it more likely that they will (find their voices) if we remain content simply to *listen* now that women are making it clear that they are ready to share their stories with us.

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*Heidi Grace, she coloured our world with Love*

*15 short months of joy we were given*

*Life is going on around us  
When all inside feels dead*

*A machine keeps life in a body unwilling  
The heart just wants to give up  
One year it has been  
Since our daughter so small  
Was cruelly taken away*

*No more laughter or shrieks  
Can be heard through our halls  
Our home and our hearts  
Are empty with grief  
As the deathly silence lingers.*

*Carol Geitzler*





# Investigating Specifications for Personhood: Escaping the Influence of Role Rigidity

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## Abstract

This paper presents a treatment approach which has been found useful in helping two clients escape the potentially oppressive influence of "specification for personhood" (i.e., the cognitive frame-of-reference used to define *selfdom*). A step-by-step general description of this process is provided which includes examples of therapist questions and an intervention ritual.

In the solution-focused model of therapy practiced by Michael White (White, 1983; White, 1986), *specifications of personhood* are postulated to be one of the major restraints which can keep individuals and families stuck in habitual patterns which they would like to escape. In fact, this concept is one of the underlying assumptions of White's work (White, 1988a). These specifications can be thought of as a *text* which we refer to in order to determine how we are to behave as a person. Extending this literary analogy further, such specifications can be viewed as the text of a novel that has been primarily authored by sources which are external to the character (client) in question. Sources such as familial, societal, and cultural, provide much of the basis for how we judge ourselves and those around us. In other words, these sources form the *frame-of-reference* which we tend to use to define our *selfdom*. It is as if we are readers of a story in which we play the central role, but which has been penned by someone else (White & Epston, 1989).

At times, such specifications can prove to be problematic. This tends to occur when the people involved come so much under the influence of the rules for *selfdom* that they are restrained from seeing any other avenues of choice. This prohibits them from arriving at alternate solutions for the dilemmas in which they find themselves (White, 1988b).

A classic example of the domination of such specifications can be found in the

familial, societal, and cultural transmission of stereotypical *gender roles*. A sample list of such specifications is provided below:

Male Specifications	Female Specifications
Silent	Talkative
Stoic	Animated
Strong	Weak
Unfeeling	Feeling
Bread winner	Home maker
Head of household	Subservient
Macho	Southern belle
Aggressive	Passive
Competitive	Docile
Action oriented	Acted upon
Rational	Emotional

Individually, strict adherence to such roles can be quite restraining. People can find themselves so under the influence of this type of script that their lives are literally not their own. They live, act, and behave according to standards which may or may not be beneficial to their current life situation.

Interactionally, when couples enter into relationships which are initially based upon external standards, and when subsequently one of the partners begins to change, drastic relational difficulties can result. Resentment, anger, disillusionment, and distrust are common presenting symptoms in such cases. While one member of the dyad remains solidly under the influence of traditional gender specifications, the other may maintain that they are tired of such an arrangement. Often it is the female who experiences such fatigue, while her male counterpart feels confused and angry at changes which he doesn't understand. Such couples commonly enter therapy with the general complaint of communication problems. This is usually quite accurate, but the underlying aspect of the communication difficulties can often be found within the gender specifications which define the roles and characters they are playing.

This paper will report on two cases in

which the specifications of personhood concept was used as the primary basis for intervention. Both of the clients were female and came to therapy requesting relief from the influence of the *past* upon their *present*. They were of the notion that influences out of the past were making it very difficult to be the kind of person that they desired to be. These difficulties were being experienced in a variety of symptoms which included problems with sleeping, recurrent nightmares, relationship difficulties (primarily with their parents and men), and a general feeling that they were not yet free to be in charge of their own lives, emotions, and thoughts. The therapy in the two cases was conducted in a similar fashion although the specifics of the cases were different. The steps used are presented in a general format in the hope that this will render them more useable for the reader.

## Step 1: Exploratory Opening Questions

This approach begins with an exploration of how the problem is influencing the individuals involved. This involves using the initial one or two sessions to ask questions which are designed to gather information and provide openings for the clients to receive new information as well. This questioning is done in the style of the Milan Team (Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, and Prata, 1978; Selvini-Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, and Prata, 1980; Tomm, 1984) as well as Michael White's guidelines for questioning (White, 1983; White, 1988b). The questions proceed from general themes to more specific ones as the interviews progress. In this process the therapist seeks to ask questions which clarify how the problem is influencing the person, the evolution of the *life* of the problem, and how the trouble the person is experiencing might be relying on the problem for its very existence. Examples of such questions are provided in much the same order they would be asked.



This is by no means a comprehensive representation of the questions that might be asked, but rather a few examples of such. Please note that a literary analogy is used as the basis for the questioning process. An *externalizing language*, as recommended by White (1988/89), is also employed.

### Preliminary/General Questions

1. What is the main problem you are experiencing? How is it influencing you at this point in time? Can you help me understand your story in this regard. How would we see your character being influenced in the story?
2. If you could change one aspect in your story concerning the way the problem is influencing you, what would you want that to be?
3. What are the major factors which invite you to actively participate in the life of the problem? If I had a written account about the evolution of this problem, what outside influences which support the problem would I read about?

### Preliminary Specifications Questions

1. If you thought carefully about your character in the story, what role would you find yourself playing? How do you think 100 readers of your story would describe your role?
2. How much influence does your gender have on the role you play in the story?
3. Does the role you are currently playing help you escape the influence of the problem or is it a handicap?
4. Does the character you are accustomed to playing influence the solutions you are willing to attempt to try in order to escape the problem? What sort of solutions would the character of this old story suggest?

### Exploring the Evolution of the Specifications

1. How is your current story like or unlike that of your parents? How are the roles and expectations that are part of the old story like or unlike those of your family of origin?
2. If your parents were here right now, what would we hear them saying about the problem that is influencing you? What would their advice be to you? What role would they recommend you play?

3. Who would be the most surprised person in your family if you begin to escape the influence of the old story? Who would be the most upset?
4. Who or what would you name as the major author of the old story? How much of the writing of this story have you done yourself? How much has been done by someone else?
5. What outside influences have had the most important influence in the authoring of the old story?

### Connecting the Specifications to Oneself

1. If we were to *novelize* your life, what would you think the title should be?
2. If you cooperated even more with the specifications of the old story, what effect would it have on you over the next month? In six months? After a year has passed?
3. Does coming under the influence of being true to the old story contribute to the continued existence of the problem? If so, how?
4. What role would you assign yourself in your family of origin? What are the rules of this role?

### Step 11: Creating the Specifications "Text"

This phase of therapy can begin when the client(s) begin to consider the influence that external specifications are having on them, and become somewhat open to exploring the matter further. This can usually be accomplished by the third session, but in some cases it might take considerably longer. An excellent criteria for determining if this point has been reached is if the therapist can "write the client's story" such that they agree that it is accurate. At this point an experiment is suggested as a method for gaining the information necessary to make an informed decision about whether they want to try and escape from the influence of the problem. This experiment takes the form of the client attempting to actually construct a list of the specifications which are currently influencing the character and story they are living. That is, he/she are to ask themselves what specifications are contained in the current *text* which they have been handed by various external sources. The client is requested to list these specifications separately on 3x5 cards. Thus, she/he will end up with a stack of specifications which currently

govern the role and story being lived.

It is suggested that the therapist help the client(s) generate several examples of such specifications in the session in order to insure that they clearly understand the experiment. Examples of the type of therapist questions used in this process are:

1. When you think of what it means to be a good male/female, what rule or specification first comes to mind?
2. In order to be true to the old story, what do you have to be sure and do in order to stay in the role of son/daughter?
3. When you think of the general categories of what it means to be a male/female in your family, what it means to be a spouse, what it means to be a parent, and what it means to be a human being, are there any requirements or rules that you would think are extremely vital?

This session is followed-up by a letter from the therapist which summarizes the content of the experiment to which the client(s) can refer. Another session is scheduled in two to four weeks to process the results.

### Step III: Processing the Specifications Text

The purpose of this session is to provide a context in which the client(s) will consider the implications of the specifications which have been generated. This is done via having the specifications read out loud and following this with questions which *call forth* distinctions concerning them. These questions focus on the distinction between the old story (*problem's story*) and a potential new story (*solution's story*). This questioning process is patterned after White's *relative influence* concept (White, 1987; 1983) which has also been clearly outlined by Stewart and Nodrick (1990). Examples of the questioning process are provided below:

### Questions Focusing on Problem's Story

1. Which of these specifications do you think that the old story relies on the most?
2. Which of these specifications are most at odds with the character you would like to be?
3. When these cards were read, which of them did you find inviting you to experience a feeling of being restrained



or controlled?

4. Which of these specifications would *coach* you the most to let things remain the same?
5. Which of the cards would you like to get rid of the most?

### Questions Focusing on Solution's Story

1. Which of these cards invite you to feel liberated and free? Which are most in line with the new character you would like to put in process?
2. Which of the cards would you want to be sure and keep?
3. How do you account for the experience that some of the specifications you have been influenced by invite you to feel restrained while others invite you to feel liberated?
4. Which cards exert the most influence over you currently, those which are part of the problem's story or those which side with a new version?

This type of questioning continues until there is a clear distinction formed between the relative influence of various specifications. As this distinction becomes clear, the next step in the therapy can begin.

### Step IV: *Posing a Dilemma*

As the client(s) began to recognize the distinction which exists between specifications which contribute to the continued existence of a problem-dominated lifestyle and those which support a new, less problem-dominated one, the therapist can begin to wonder "out loud" about which story version is the strongest. The client(s) can be presented with the dilemma of whether the old story will remain in charge with its list of specifications, or whether solution's story will hold forth and begin to assert its specifications (White, 1986). The following questions are examples of this process:

1. On one hand, it seems that some of these specifications have had their way with you in terms of siding with the problem, yet on the other hand, it appears that others invite you to escape *problem's influence*. Which of these do you think end up the strongest? Are the specifications that contribute to problem's story so strong that they will be the major author?
2. Has problem's story and its accompanying specifications got you down for the count, or do you think that you

have the resources to escape it?

3. Would you want to experiment with formulating an escape plan from oppressive specifications, or are they too strong to even consider escaping?

In most instances clients will express a desire to escape from the influence of the oppressive specifications while expressing doubt about their ability to do so. Despite these doubts, the stage is now set for the introduction of the ritual portion of the therapy.

### Step V: *An Escape Ritual*

This phase of the therapy process provides the client(s) with an escape experiment in the form of a ritual. It is based upon the work of Evan Imber-Black (1989) and Robert Bly (1990).

The 3x5 cards listing the various specifications for personhood are again utilized. The client(s) is asked to separate the cards into three groups of (1) those they would like to keep, (2) those they would like to get rid of, and (3) those they are undecided about. After this sorting has taken place (this takes varying amounts of time for different people), a session is scheduled to process it with the client(s). Questioning is again utilized to open space for the client(s) to determine when, if ever, it would be appropriate to escape the influence of the specifications so categorized? Examples of such questions are again provided:

1. How will you know when it is time to leave the specifications you would like to get rid of behind? What signs or signals would you look for to actually know it is OK?
2. If you attempted to escape from these specifications right now, would that side with the problem or with the solution? For example, would *Guilt* let you escape from them at this point in time?
3. If you decide to escape these specifications, how would you like to do that--by completely destroying them, or by putting them away somewhere?

Based upon the type of responses received, a decision is reached about if and when it would be wise to escape from the specifications. If the decision is to escape, the therapist suggests either a Burning Ritual or a Burial Ritual as a symbolic means for putting the oppressive specifications in their proper place. The client(s) are allowed to choose between the two, or to suggest an alterna-

tive of their own. A brief description of a Burning Ritual is provided below as an example:

### Burning Ritual

The client, therapist, and witnesses (if possible and if the client is willing) meet to burn the specifications so designated. Keep in mind, this is the client's ritual and should be done according to her/his wishes. The client selects the order and method of burning (i.e., reading them out loud or not, one at a time or all together, etc.) and the burning begins. (Don't forget the matches! A candle is also helpful.) As the burning progresses the therapist can make various *metaphorical comments* based upon how things are progressing. These can take the form of noticing how reluctant certain cards seem to be to leave, how easy some are to burn, etc. The client(s) are also invited to say anything that he/she might feel to be appropriate for the occasion. After all the cards are burned, the usual procedure is to put them into a container that the client has brought with him/her so they might be kept as a reminder of the *passage*. (Again the actual procedure can vary according to client wishes.) Videotapes can be made of the session and given to the client, and reflecting teams can serve as the witnesses and documenters of the ritual.

### Step VI: *Extending the Ritual*

The influence of the ritual is extended via periodic sessions in which the client(s) and therapist explore the new possibilities that exist now that the old story specifications have been put in their place. This is done via a process of questioning which encourages the client to imagine how his/her story is now different, how the characters have changed, what the next chapter might be like, etc. This phase seeks to further open the space which will allow the client(s) to become his/her own expert on themselves and to become active authors of their story. Several ideas are presented below to punctuate this process:

1. Some clients actually write what they want the next chapter to be in their story.
2. Some *play* the character they want to side with and make a 10-15 minute videotape to document it.
3. Some make audiotapes of how they want their character to be and then listen to them from time-to-time.



### Final Comments

This paper has presented a general outline of a process that the author has found useful in defeating the influence of role rigidity on two female clients. These clients required from two to four extension sessions, after the burning ritual, and both achieved very favorable outcomes. Both of these clients now serve as *consultants* to the author in cases with similar dynamics. They report that the burning of the oppressive specifications made it very difficult for them to fall completely under their control again. It should be emphasized, in closing, that each case is different and the procedure will need to be individualized accordingly. It is hoped the reader will be able to use this general format as a *springboard* from which to experiment with this type of treatment, and to add interesting and creative aspects of their own.

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## The Kiss of Forevermore

*You love her so very much.  
For reasons not yet known, you hesitate to trust her.  
Even supposing she has loved you always,  
she hates you still.  
Time sees through your desire unencumbered.  
And because God continues to love you (both),  
forever will repeat the eternal kiss ...*

*Richard M. Lennard  
19/12/90*



# Beginnings of a "HIPs and PIPs" Approach to Psychiatric Assessment

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Family Therapy Program  
The University of Calgary

In the spring of 1988, the Family Therapy Program at The University of Calgary was faced with external administrative pressures to use the DSM-III diagnostic framework in assessing the children and adolescents with emotional and behavioral problems who were to be seen in the program. It was suggested that the program use a DSM diagnosis as an intake criterion for the child's family to be accepted for treatment. As Director of the Program, I opposed an imposition of the DSM framework for a number of reasons. My reservations about the DSM were outlined in the first issue of this newsletter. Central among these was a concern about the potential pathologizing effects of psychiatric "labeling" on children and adolescents. The social stigma associated with a psychiatric diagnosis adds a significant burden to the person so labeled and makes recovery more difficult. The labeling effects may be subtle but they tend to become increasingly pervasive and malignant as growing acceptance of the psychiatric label spreads through the professional and social networks of the child, and eventually becomes internalized as part of the child's identity. I was not willing to accept a diagnostic means that contradicted the therapeutic ends of the program.

At the same time, however, I felt that one of the concerns behind the request to use DSM diagnoses should be taken seriously. This concern revolved around the need to make socially responsible judgments about which families could be offered the therapeutic services that were supported with public funds. The administrative argument was that if there was a diagnosable mental disorder in a family member, then the use of publicly funded treatment resources was justified. My position was that a more therapeutic means to determine eligibility for public services could be developed by drawing upon the systemic understanding of mental problems that was emerging in the field of family therapy. Even though such a process could take years, I offered to em-

bark upon developing such an alternative and am grateful that the administrators involved accepted my proposal. The result was to initiate a project in collaboration with the therapists and trainees in the Family Therapy Program to develop the "HIPs and PIPs" approach to psychiatric assessment.

The primary assumption on which this project is based, is that the patterns of human interaction in which persons are embedded have a major influence on their experiences and on their mental health. Some interpersonal patterns have "pathologizing" effects on the persons involved while other patterns have "healing" or "wellness" effects. The specific effect depends on the nature of the behaviors enacted in the interaction and the meanings attributed to those behaviors by the persons involved in the pattern. Once an interaction pattern becomes established, other individuals are more easily "recruited" into participating in it, and thus, they add to its effects. In other words, the mental health effects of a particular pattern may not just be recurrent and repetitive; they could be cumulative, and occasionally even become exponential.

An example of a basic Pathologizing Interpersonal Pattern (PIP) between two persons is "criticism inviting defensiveness, and defensiveness inviting further criticism, etc." As each person re-enacts their respective criticism and defensiveness, their behaviors become coupled in a cyclical or "circular" interaction pattern. Increased criticism triggers increased defensiveness and vice versa. (See Figure 1) From a systemic perspective, the pattern seems to take on a "life" of its own and appears to "induct" the participants to continue in it. Over time, the pattern may become stabilized

as a major component of an ongoing interpersonal relationship. If the relationship is an important one and the pattern persists for an extended period, it tends to promote "psychopathological" responses such as righteous indignation, chronic frustration, hatred, and aggressiveness "in" the criticizing person; and oppositional behavior, rebelliousness, paranoia, avoidance, isolation, and/or depression "in" the defending person. These individual effects then tend to be regarded as reflecting pathology within those persons. Yet, from a systemic perspective, the primary pathology lies in the interpersonal interaction pattern. The individual psychopathology, if it still can be coherently described as "individual," is only secondary. Nevertheless, the effects of the pattern of criticism/defensiveness can become extremely destructive in relation to persons and could even escalate to precipitate violence or suicide. It is because of these problematic effects that the pattern is referred to as "pathologizing."

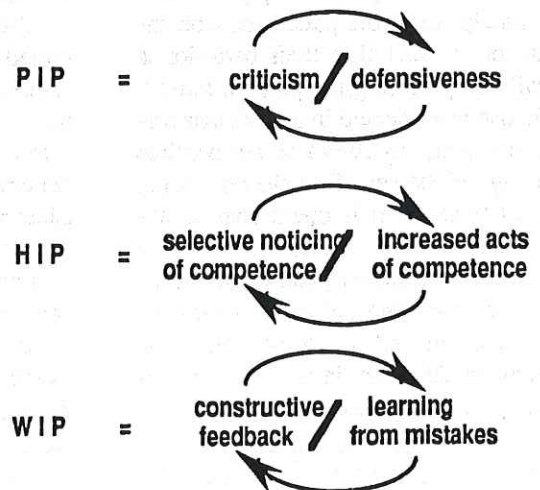


Figure 1

A Healing Interpersonal Pattern (HIP) that could serve as a specific antidote to the above noted PIP might be "se-



lective noticing and acknowledgement of competence which invites more acts of competence, which, in turn, invites more noticing of competence, etc." In this circular pattern, the complementary behaviors clearly have positive effects including greater respect for the other in the first individual and greater self-confidence and appreciation of the other in the second. Most human beings have the potential for enacting this healing pattern simply by virtue of having experienced it in their own growth and development during childhood. Parents often spend hours watching their children for signs of achievement, for instance, in beginning to walk or talk, and heap praise upon the child when it makes progress which, of course, supports the child's efforts to continue to perform competently. This growth or "healing" pattern may, however, be quite difficult to initiate and maintain when the pathologizing pattern is well established and dominates the relationship. Under such circumstances, therapeutic input may be very important in facilitating a shift from the PIP to the HIP.

One of the reasons that a PIP may be difficult to interrupt and replace is that the participants in the pattern may be unaware of the fact that their behavior is actually perpetuating the pattern. Indeed, while one is immersed in a particular pattern, one tends to attend to the possible meanings of the specific behaviors being enacted (whether it is one's own behaviors or those of the other) rather than to the overall interaction pattern itself. Furthermore, many individual responses become habitual and/or are nonconscious. A conversation that invites the participants in a pattern to become aware of and recognize that they are, in fact, immersed in a PIP is often a first step in interrupting it. Additional conversation to identify a healing alternative opens the possibility of consciously and deliberately redirecting the interaction in a healing direction. Such a clarifying conversation would be an example of a Transforming Interpersonal Pattern (TIP) which enables a shift from a PIP to a HIP.

A Wellness Interpersonal Pattern (WIP) that could be associated with the above noted HIP and PIP might entail "constructive feedback that invites the recognition of mistakes with new learning which invites further constructive feedback and greater learning, etc." In

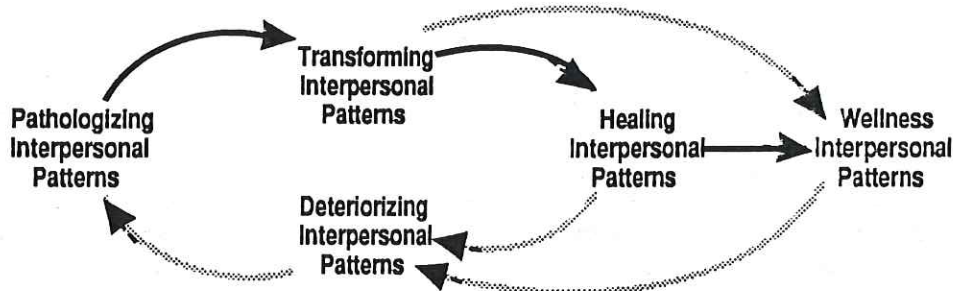


Figure 2

this pattern explicit help is offered, and is accepted as such by the other. Such a pattern often emerges in coaching and teaching situations. The efficiency of problem-solving is usually much greater in such a wellness pattern than in the healing pattern (of selective acknowledgement and growing competence), but to be actualized, the WIP requires more interpersonal trust and personal "strength" on the part of the participants. Thus, it is often necessary to temporarily replace a PIP with a HIP before a further progression to a WIP can be achieved successfully.

PIPs and HIPs generate, and are supported by, different emotions. For instance, anger and fear can become coupled in a pattern of interpersonal "emotioning" to sustain the behavioral pattern of criticism and defensiveness. Likewise love and pride can become coupled to support a pattern of selective acknowledgment inviting competence and vice versa. When therapists take these emotions into account, they are usually more effective in introducing TIPs and facilitating a shift from PIPs to HIPs. There are, of course, also "slips" that occur from HIPs (or WIPs) back to PIPs. Any unexpected traumatic event may initiate such a regression. Another, more subtle type of slip could be a Deteriorating Interpersonal Pattern (DIP) such as "lack of clarification inviting lack of awareness which invites further lack of clarification, etc." until something serious happens to reactivate the

criticism and defensiveness. A schematic outline of some of the possible movements among these patterns (within an ongoing relationship) is illustrated in Figure 2.

It is assumed that any long term relationship (with family members, friends, workmates, or professionals) evolves to include a wide "repertoire" of possible interaction patterns or complementary "couplings." Inevitably, certain patterns become more fully elaborated and deeply established than others. These patterns may be distinguished as PIPs, TIPs, HIPs, WIPs, or DIPs, depending on their effects. Whether a family, for instance, fosters pathology, healing, or wellness among its members, depends on which patterns dominate their daily activities and experiences. Obviously, a predominance of PIPs would be extremely undesirable. However, active participation in a pathologizing pattern is typically outside one's awareness at the time. Hence, its pathologizing effects are usually inadvertent. For instance, the original criticism may have been intended as constructive feedback rather than any form of hostility or aggression. And the original defensiveness may have been intended as self protection rather than rejection, denial, or disqualification of the other. But when these behaviors become coupled and patterned into an ongoing interpersonal system, this discrepancy between intent and effect tends to be overlooked or misinterpreted. What becomes important in one's lived experience and to one's health is not only which patterns predominate, but also the intensity of the patterns and the flexibility in movement among them.

Because HIPs and PIPs influence the mental health of the persons participating in the patterns so significantly and do so in opposite directions, a focus on these patterns is considered highly relevant to any psychiatric assessment. Thus, as an initial step to develop an alternative to DSM diagnoses, my colleagues and I at the Family Therapy Program began to

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# Tomorrow

by Jan Semeer

*Jan Semeer is the pen name of a former psychiatric patient who subsequently was seen in family and feminist therapy. She began writing short stories last year as a means to enable her own self-healing and to offer others a "window" into some of her painful life experiences.*

"They found her on the kitchen floor," one said. "Why the kitchen, weren't there more dignified places in the house?" "She always was different, a little strange and somewhat of a loner, but quite nice really." "Who'd ever have thought that she would go as far as this?" "Well, of course, she had been on a psych ward some years ago." "That shows one never knows what goes on inside a person's head even if they seem fine again!"

"Strange though, that the family hadn't noticed that anything was wrong, surely if one is in contact with a person every day one must notice that something is not as it should be. They must be extremely upset." Thus, the people whispered among themselves. But not one of them dared to approach the family since they did not know what to say.

*"How much longer can I hold on to the edge of this cavernous black pit?" she thought.*

Her friend said, "She always talked about it so ordinarily, as if the subject was the same as going somewhere for dinner, or buying a new dress. I always wondered how she could do that so easily. It was not normal. It must have been on her mind all along."

"Remember how she requested a satin nightgown for the occasion?" another responded. She said, "It would be awful to have one's breasts squashed into a bra, legs slipped into nylons, feet pushed into shoes, and the body encased in the prettiest dress one owned; dolled-up, ready to go to a party; she felt that was unnatural. A satin nightgown was much more appropriate."

"The patriarchal nature of the Bible really bothered her," someone else said, "so she did not go to church much anymore; she found it too male dominated. But she never rejected God. Once she



could shed the notion of God as an old man sitting on a throne somewhere in the sky judging our every day moves and could accept God as either female or male, she found some comfort."

"To me she looked so serene and at ease with herself; I was always slightly envious of her," another signed. "Her writing was very personal, very interesting and showed promise; did she ever let you read any of it?"

*"Why not the kitchen?" she thought.*

*"It is the cosiest room of the house really. I know that I hate cooking, but that does not make me hate the kitchen. This is where most of life goes on in our house: cooking, baking, family meals, washing-up, stacking dishes, so much of it done together. In the other rooms we are all scattered about, one here and one there, all on our own, even in the living-room, where we might all be sitting together we're still separated, all caught up in our own thing, watching television, reading the newspaper, lost in a book. In the kitchen we communicate. Yes, that's my favorite room; it is like a womb--centered and warm. This is the best place for it."*

"She told me she was a feminist, that's where all her troubles stemmed from. If she had stayed away from feminism none of this would ever have happened," her sister said. "Those women with their crazy notion of equality are breaking up the families. If they stayed at home and looked after their families the world would be a better place for us all. Being a proper housewife keeps one occupied from morning until night, then one has no time to moan and groan about being bored. It's a full-time job to look after a man properly and make him appreciate his home, and I'm not even talking about the children, they really suffer with a feminist mother.

Look where all this got my sister--trips to the psychiatrist and now this."

*She thought, "Which knife will it be? This one is nice and sharp, but with too much pressure it might go right through my wrist, it is so thin. No, this one will be better, it is sharp too, but has a jagged edge. When the jagged edge is in the wrist the rest of the knife has not entered as yet and I have better control. I can let the blood drip into the sink, then, the place will not become dirty. But what happens when I become too weak to keep my arms in the sink? When I fall the blood will flow onto the floor, such a shame for this lovely kitchen. And what a mess for someone to find and have to clean up. The feeling of the warm blood oozing out of me, life slowly flowing away, that's what I now want. I don't know why I find this appealing, why this is my chosen way to leave the world. Someone to whom I trusted my story some time ago, and my former fears of how I wanted to die, suggested that perhaps it was because of my war experiences. I don't know. All I can say is that now it feels like a good way to go: slowly, warmly, oozingly, bleedingly, discharging like a womb."*

She almost lovingly holds the knife and cradles it to her breast then slowly puts it back into the drawer.

*"I have not slid into the pit yet; I can hold onto the edge a little longer; I still have some strength left..." she thinks. "Perhaps tomorrow will be a better day."*

She is sitting at the kitchen table.

*"This is a good place to be," she thinks, "warm and comfortable. When I have finished my tea I will start writing again." ♡*



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distinguish specific PIPs that generate or support the common mental problems that were referred to us. To date, approximately 200 differing PIPs have been distinguished. Many of these are similar and appear to overlap with one another but there are also some contrasting differences among them. We are still working on clarifying, classifying, and documenting these and other patterns. As a second step towards responding to the administrative concern about eligibility for publicly funded treatment, we have devised a severity scale to rate the intensity and tenacity of the PIPs identified in an assessment. The scale is divided into two components, an "experienced" severity rating and a "reported" severity rating. The experienced scale focuses on patterns of interaction experienced by the clinician in the here and now of the assessment session itself. The reported scale focuses on the patterns of interaction that are reported by the family (or by others) to have occurred prior to the session.

We feel that it is socially responsible to allocate limited treatment resources to interrupt PIPs that are actively producing pathology, regardless of whether one distinguishes an "individual" mental disorder or not. Indeed, if a diagnosable disorder is not yet evident, but the PIPs are allowed to continue, a disorder may be expected to emerge later. Thus, PIPs that are intense and severe should be given a high priority. This would be in keeping with a basic principle of triage: treat the most treatable first. In other words, it seems more justified to apply limited resources to interrupt PIPs that are occurring in the present than to treat an easily

diagnosable "chronic" patient, who may be the victim or "end product" of PIPs that took place over an extended period of time in the past.

The process of clinicians assessing mental problems is, in itself, a culturally determined pattern of interaction which could have either pathologizing or healing effects. As already noted, when this process becomes one of sticking psychiatric labels onto persons, it can be pathologizing. Our alternative is for clinicians to distinguish, assess, diagnose, and label selected interpersonal patterns of interaction as pathological rather than the individuals involved in those patterns. This implies a fundamental shift in focus from the personal to the interpersonal. The pathologizing effect of labelling is thereby applied to the pathologizing pattern rather than to the person in it. In other words, labeling PIPs pathologizes the pathology, not the person. A further effect of labeling an interaction pattern is that doing so leaves space for the persons involved to disassociate themselves from the pattern which could be the beginning of healing. Finally, the distinction of a specific PIP implies the possibility of distinguishing a specific HIP as an antidote. These are all potentially constructive influences on the mental health of the persons involved in the patterns. Thus, the HIPs and PIPs "means" to assessment does not contradict the "ends" of the program, it contributes to them.

It is important to note that the diagnostic shift from the personal to the interpersonal is not the same as a simple shift in focus from the individual to the family unit. All families are assumed to elaborate a vast repertoire of interaction patterns, some of which are PIPs and others

are HIPs. The qualitative mental health differences between families lie in which patterns predominate. Hence, there is no strong need to diagnose families either. Indeed, I am also opposed to labelling families as "psychosomatic," "enmeshed," "dysfunctional," or "schizophrenogenic." Insofar as one identifies with a particular family, the labels attached to that family also become attached to the self. The process of classifying and diagnosing families simply pathologizes more people.

Further developments in our "HIPs and PIPs" approach to psychiatric assessment are already underway. These include a clarification of the orienting effects of previously internalized interpersonal patterns, and the inclusion of the observer who distinguishes the pattern as part of a larger pattern. It is anticipated that these and other related issues will be reported in subsequent editions of the newsletter.

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### The 8th Annual Calgary Participants' Conference

**Dates:** May 16 - 17, 1991  
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**For information contact:**  
Ms. Elaine Kuhlemeyer  
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