

PRESENTATION REVIEW

A Family Approach To Treating Troubled Adolescents; Couples on the Fault Line: Contemporary Couples

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The essence of Peggy Papp's presentation was delightfully person-centered. There was no mistaking Papp's unconditional caring and respect for the couples and families with whom she worked. "I find that if you let the family lead you," and "the family will guide you to their themes" are expressions that epitomize the sincerity underlying Papp's conviction in clients' knowledge about their own growth.

When I asked her about the potentially manipulative nature of her positive-oriented reframing and her possibly paradoxical communications, Papp a bit caught off guard and even a bit offended. She was thusly reactive it seemed, hearing her response and continuing to listen to her methods, because she genuinely values and connects with her clients. She truly appeared to believe that couples and family members are doing the best that they can—and that a part of that best highlights virtuous qualities—even though the behavior expressed by it may appear at first glance to be relationship-defeating (e.g., excessively criticizing a spouse; consistently expressing dissatisfaction with a child's not living up to their potential).

Papp's theoretical stance regarding approaching couples' and families' themes mirrored—with considerable likeness—Zimring's (see this issue) person-centered theoretical stance that accounts empathically for clients' ongoing unfolding intentions. In demonstrating her work throughout several sessions Papp showed herself to be a highly focused listener. She centered on family members' intentions. She helped them attend to their intentions and to assess how their actions were facilitating and inhibiting their personal goals. No one was "picked on." Everyone was "aligned with." She clearly facilitated clients to direct their own fates as a part of their relational systems.

For some years person-centered therapists have been eager to consider models of therapy for couples and families that are congenial to a client-centered philosophy. Adherents of client-centered or person-centered therapy resonate with foci that place client goals and values

at the core of the process. Papp's sessions were unrushed and her goals were indefinable apart from the values and goals of her clients.

If you have the opportunity to attend one of Peggy Papp's presentations I'd highly recommend it. She is and has been engaged in various "projects," for instance, the depression and gender project and the women's project in family therapy. Her co-founded themes and belief systems project was begun in 1988 and continues presently. These projects remind me of John Keith Wood's vision of person-centered therapy as an experimental phenomenon.

Papp develops her approach to and with each new family she encounters. She would be considered in my opinion, to maintain a highly person-centered practice. I would refer to her interactions with couples and families as largely non-directive even with her willingness to use homework and other creative assignments. To one attendee's question regarding assigning homework that a couple might be thought unlikely to do, she responded, "It's fine with me if they don't. It probably means it wasn't useful or relevant for them."

Peggy's audience gasped when one of her clients gave up a high-paying, high-prestige job offer in order to fulfill her novelist aspirations. It was obvious that Peggy held no interest or agenda in helping her client with anything more-- or less-- than fulfilling her own potentiality within her marriage.

I've included a few references in the event you'd like to follow-up with them. Readers involved in training marital and family therapists might also want to order the video library catalogue from the Ackerman Institute (see address and phone above). I anticipate that my students will learn a lot about good therapy from Papp's therapeutic countenance.

Papp, P. (1993). *The worm in the bud, Secrets between parents and children*. In E. Imber-Black, *Secrets in families and family therapy*. NY: Norton.

Papp, P. (1990). *Process of change*. NY: Guilford.

Walters M., Papp, P., Silverstein, O., & Carter, E. (1988). (Eds.). *The invisible web: Gender patterns in family relationships*. NY: Guilford.

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