

Coming full Circle to Systemic Family Constellations in personal therapy

Therapy has come a long way since Freud's discovery of talk therapy and dream analysis. Since then there have been many developments and innovations in counselling and psychotherapy for individuals, groups or families.

Intentions of, Counselling and Therapy.

Some of the intentions of the therapeutic process may be to change behaviour, resolve inner conflicts, improve the ability to relate and to locate and develop resources that raise self-esteem, encourage empowerment and change perceptions. Until now, this has been done mainly in personal therapy, focusing on the inner construction of the individual, with less emphasis of the person in their family group or environment. With the advent of Systemic Family Constellations as developed by Bert Hellinger, a German psychotherapist, since the 1990's, a new approach has emerged looking at each person as continuing to be part of their family of origin's energy and intrinsically linked to past generations. Perhaps one of the main differences between this approach and the earlier family therapies such as Bowen, Strategic or Experiential family therapies is that the client does not have to take their family to the therapeutic process. Being able to persuade all family members to come together for such sessions has remained one of the challenges of traditional Family therapy. In Systemic Family Constellations, the client works with their perception of their place in their family through representatives in a phenomenological experiential manner in a workshop or in a private session. Due to its phenomenological philosophical approach, little background information is required.

Using the knowledge of the innovators

Following on from the great innovations of the work of, Virginia Satir's "sculpting", Pearle's Gestalt therapy, Primal therapy, Psychoanalysis (Freud), Psychodynamic (Jung and Adler), Transactional Analysis (Berne), Milton Erickson the great Hypnotist and a range of Family Systems therapies, Bert Hellinger has developed Systemic Family Constellations. While working in Africa as a priest and teacher Hellinger noticed an archaic Primal Order that he noticed was missing, when working later with family groups in Europe as a therapist. Hellinger has named this order the Orders of Love using the work of Ivan Boszormenyi Nagy who developed the idea of invisible loyalties between generation (as cited by Frank. U. 2003). Hellinger noticed that when the family or relationship was in Order, that love flowed more easily to the benefit of them all.

This may reflect Carl Jung's view of the connection of the individual as a soul within a larger family soul, that links us in the present, to past generations. From a Constellation point of view these themes have developed into the idea that all members of a system have a place and a right to belong. As long as each person has their rightful place and accepts full responsibility for themselves and the consequences of their actions, the family energy is

healthy and strong and the primal love connections are felt by all, leaving each person free to live their own life, while still maintaining a healthy connection to their roots.

What goes wrong in Families?

From a Systemic Family Constellation perspective, entanglements and dysfunctions occur when tragedies, exclusions and denial take place in families according to Bert Hellinger (2006). This has the effect of taking away energy from certain members and causing other members, often their children or other relatives, feeling the need to support them (emotionally), compensate or identify with them, in some way. This causes disorder and blocks the nature flow of love through the family and forms alliances that are largely unconscious, which are often felt as 'burdens'. According to Systemic Family Constellation philosophy and practice, this is how dysfunctional dynamics are passed on through generations. Often one person in the present is identifying unconsciously, with the dysfunctional unresolved energy of an ancestor, even though they may not know the person or the family history.

What is a Constellation?

Constellation work is an energetic process that picks up the underlying dynamics of the family. This is done by setting up a constellation of a clients' issue in a workshop using representatives (or in a private sessions using symbols). Representatives of a client's issue are set up spatially in a room. From here it is possible to tap into the family "energy matrix" and bring to light the entanglement and allow the client and the family energy to find a suitable resolution. Once a client sets up their issue using representatives, a field, which has been named "the knowing field", is set up and the representatives start to notice feelings or mild sensations in their body. From this experience, new information may arise. The facilitator observes, guides and responds to the energy field as the constellation unfolds and new possibilities present themselves as possible solutions.

What is different about this process?

The client does not have to take the people of their issue to the workshop or private session. This process is very much about helping the client go beyond their 'story' which is one perspective only, to a new perspective or to the essence of their family situation in "Acknowledging What is" Bert Hellinger (1999) as a first step in their inner healing, in a respectful way to all concerned. It is also about encouraging each person to take full responsibility for themselves, leaving others free to make their own choices. After a family Constellation it is very common for family members of the client, to report changes in themselves and their perceptions or feelings, even though they may be unaware of one of their group doing a constellation as explained Payne (2006). Perhaps this is also tapping into Carl Jung's idea of the collective conscious of families and groups.

In fact the main purpose of a Family Constellation is to help the family reveal the Primal love that connects them all, as love is a great healer. The process is a brief intervention that may stand alone or be part of a longer therapeutic process.

The macro and the micro coming together for a more integrated approach.

It seems there is a place in 2010 to facilitate clients' gaining reconnection or resolution with their roots and their family soul in a healing and respectful way. There also continues to be a place for resolving inner conflicts using the wide range of traditional counselling methodologies available, in order to facilitate a change of behaviour, beliefs, perceptions and to resolve or control distressing emotions. However with an awareness through the advent of Systemic Family Constellations showing individuals as separate while also part of the family and ancestral field and deeply affected by loyalties, entanglements, blind love, tragedies and exclusions, it is also necessary to also look at the larger picture of the system, the macro, as well as the micro, individual experience of inner conflicts.

According to Eva Madelung/Barbara Innecken,(2004),

“The inner parts of a person are often interwoven with external family members. When we set up a family in a constellation as we see them, we are representing the effects they have on us. That is why when we set up our family, are we not also setting up our inner family, the inner parts of ourselves?”

In fact in light of this new development in therapy, to attempt to help a client with personal empowerment without the consideration of the bigger energy field that he or she is caught up in, may often be missing the mark. Ursula Frank made the point that we are all a product of all that has gone before us in our family systems so that the macro and the micro are inextricably linked.

Who's emotions do we feel?

Many of us appear to be born into a sense of sadness, guilt, shame, anger, isolation, suicidal tendencies, or any other baggage which we continue to carry, but are not personally ours but rather part of our family system. Hellinger (2006) makes the point that it is a paradox that the resolution with the family soul is the very thing that allows the client to gain the freedom and autonomy to live their life with more freedom and choice, so that they may face the world with more strength and optimism.

From a systemic Family Constellation perspective in dealing with a disturbed child, it may be necessary to resolve any difficulties that may be present in the relationship of one or both of the child's parents with their own parents, before the parents can stand in their strength as parents, so that the generation rift may be healed, as explained by Hellinger (1999).

There are similar dynamics coming from our family of origin that affect our love relationships. Emotions form intangible links between people according to Leibermeister. (2006) which we ignore at our cost and are a central focus in guiding Constellation practice.

In 2010 and beyond, more therapists are beginning to see the value of a more integrated approach to counselling and therapy and I would like to draw attention to the value of pioneering therapists and philosophers that have provided us with the basis of our present counselling and psychotherapy approaches, which are often an integration of several philosophies and practices. We have no need to re-invent the wheel as we continue to

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select styles of therapy according to our personal preferences in continuing to develop more holistic and integrated approach's. Systemic Family Constellations is a dynamic approach that has continued to evolve since its presentation to the world by Bert Hellinger in the 1990's and is now in the hands of many creative therapists all round the world that is likely to infiltrate many therapies being developed now and into the future. It appears that therapy itself is becoming more integrated in its quest to be more effective and relevant to a population that requires more cost and time efficient services.

It is a timely reminder to us not forget, that we are all connected and that each of us is a soul within the family soul, that exists within the larger cultural soul and within the greater soul of Humanity. We are not alone.

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