

Systemic Family Constellations;

Generations

They gave
We receive
They die
We grieve
Life goes on, Life goes on

We give
They receive
We die
They grieve
Life goes on, Life goes on

“From Many Hearts, One Soul” by Gary Stuart. *Taken from the Knowing Field International Family Constellations journal. Issue 7*

Family Constellations has become the fastest growing psychotherapeutic technique that is catching world wide interest. It is a revolutionary dynamic and evolving therapy that has been developed by a German psychotherapist in the 1970's called Bert Hellinger. Now in his eighties, Bert Hellinger is still practicing and teaching his approach to psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors and other mental health professionals throughout Europe, North and South America, and Asia. At a time when mindfulness is becoming more a part of our therapeutic process and many of us are aware of moving towards a more wholistic approach in counselling and psychotherapy, a new way of approaching family and individual therapy is here in Sydney Australia that addresses the individual on many levels. Intellectual, emotional and spiritual. This is a process of looking at a relationship or emotional issue of a client, usually in a confidential group with a facilitator. This can also take place in individual sessions. Even though this sounds a little like psychodrama it is quite different. Psychodrama is an excellent therapeutic process, whereas Family Constellations draws elements from many different therapeutic techniques, is a very subtle, gentle process which is often quite profound.

“Family Constellations and movements of the Soul is an alive, uniquely fresh phenomenological experience. It has the potential to touch our deepest cores, transforming our lives and the lives of those around us. Hidden dynamics, often spanning two or three generations, may appear in the family “field” and lead to distress, illness and emotional difficulties. This work requires, while at the same time deepens, a profound respect for the mystery of life and the forces that shape it and moves you towards peace in the soul.” *Professor J.Edward Lynch. Chair of the Graduate Marriage and Family Therapy Program at South Connecticut State University, USA.*

Bert Hellinger, formerly a catholic priest, became a family therapist later in life. In his search for effective methods for helping families and individuals with their relationships, he researched and studied many different therapies. He seems to have adopted the term “Family Constellation” from the psychoanalyst Alfred Adler who was both a colleague and student of the great Sigmund Freud. Alfred Adler's focus was very much the individual and their environment. Adler studied family groups noticing that there seemed

to be a “pecking order” in families. Bert Hellinger has combined elements of many different therapies into present day Systemic Family Constellations. These include Alfred Adler’s philosophy involving sibling characteristics according to “position in the family”, Karl Jung’s philosophy on “collective consciousness”, Bowen’s systemic family therapy, Virginia Satir’s Conjoint family therapy (sculpting), Psychodrama, Primal therapy, Eric Berne’s Transactional Analysis and some elements of the great hypnotherapist and psychiatrist Milton Erickson. Through his work with families and couples Bert discovered an apparent ancient system called the “Orders of Love.” These provide a framework of basic rules or guide lines, which are believed to be necessary to promote healthy family and individual dynamics.

How do the Orders of Love become disrupted in a family system?

According to Bert Hellinger, disturbances in families occur when the ancient Orders of Love, are disturbed in some way. Family Constellations philosophy embraces Karl Jung’s view that we as individuals are also connected to the collective energies of our individual families, our culture, and our race and on a higher level, the human race. We are all connected.

Disturbances develop in families due to disruptions caused by such things as; war, tragedies, early or tragic deaths, injustice, adoption, shame, guilt and exclusions of family members. If any of these circumstances take place and are not acknowledged or dealt with appropriately by the family, then these disturbances are passed down to the future generations via the collective consciousness of the family energy system to the present generations where they may be played out in various ways. This often results in a range of relationship or emotional problems or low self esteem. Family Constellations has been used more recently to help in the healing and reconciliation of individuals of the second and third generations of nazi and holocaust victims and in such places as South Africa and Chile, to name a few. Helping those who are still suffering from unresolved repercussions and injustices from earlier generations.

The phenomena of Family Constellations

Imagine a situation where a group of people are sitting in a large circle. The facilitator asks who would like to look at an issue. A client comes forward and states their issue briefly and the facilitator asks a few factual questions about the situation, without wanting the client to go into their “story” or talk about the personalities of the people concerned. Once the facilitator knows enough facts, they will ask the client to choose representatives for the people of the issue from the group e.g. for himself, his mother and father. The client will then be asked to place the representatives according to how he feels they are in relationship to each other. Once this is done, the client sits in a place where he can observe the process. Once set up, the energy of the real people appears to descend on the representatives and the process proceeds with the guidance of the facilitator, until a suitable resolution is found. This energy is called the Knowing Field. The facilitator will now observe the dynamics and seek to follow the energy of the field and the representatives. The facilitator may ask the representatives what they are feeling or noticing, adding other members of the family if necessary or moving people to different positions, at times. In addition, “Healing sentences” may be given, emotions may be released and the constellation is completed when the energy is more relaxed and

comfortable and the client has experienced a new perspective. The client may be asked to take his place in the constellation at this point to experience the new dynamics that have been revealed.

A case study taken from the Knowing Field- International Family Constellations journal. Issue 7

The Boy Who was not Heard.

The boy's parents came to a constellation workshop in Austria to seek help for their younger son who had developed a therapy-resistant stutter that impaired his self-esteem and social development at the age of seven. The family history revealed that the maternal great grandfather had been a high ranking official in the German SS. After World War II he was tried in court for involvement in atrocities. Like other Austrian families, he shared the fate of someone who had originally been held in high esteem but after the collapse of the third Reich, the family had become ashamed of his deeds. He was shunned by them and later committed suicide.

The constellation revealed an identification of the boy's representative with both the great grandfather and the victims. Generally such an identification is called a "dual identification." The stutter was an embodied attempt of the boy, three generations later, to speak the forbidden truth of his great grandfather and simultaneously to also honour the victims. The boy lost his stammer two weeks after the constellation: it has not returned over the last two years.

The Knowing Field

The Knowing Field has been a phenomenon of Family Constellations that is difficult to understand. It is something that has to be experienced to be believed. Professor Albrecht Mahr, a German psychoanalyst who is also a well known and respected International Family Constellation Educator and facilitator, is presently involved in a scientific study to find out more about the Knowing field. The term "Knowing field" seems to be the most appropriate term for describing the field phenomena which forms on and in the representatives and guides the process to a resolution and an acceptance of "what is". "On the one hand it can be seen as a poetic term, poetry being the most accurate language at the level of the soul. On the other hand, "Knowing field" is inspired by Rupert Sheldrake's findings on morphogenic fields and the extended mind, as well as quantum physics and its surprising discoveries regarding the transmission of information and knowledge through quantum fields" *John L. Payne The healing of individuals, families and nations.*

This revolutionary process of Systemic Family Constellations has become the fastest growing psychotherapeutic technique in Europe and is catching worldwide interest. It is particularly effective in improving relationship among members of a family or an organization. It can help families to deal with most difficult situations: life and death, separation or divorce, difficult fate, mental disorder, adoption, physical illness, addictions etc.

Where does that leave traditional counselling methods?

Family Constellations can help release a person from the trans-generational dynamics that restrict them and leave them free for the inner work of the counselling process. Counselling or psychotherapy continue to be greatly beneficial in helping the client in improving their communication, social skills, coping with their emotions, creating healthy boundaries for themselves to mention only a few areas. In addition, no one can over exaggerate the healing power of the therapeutic alliance that takes between a client and their therapist, so counselling and psychotherapy can be used in conjunction with Family Constellations where it is deemed to be helpful.

The psychotherapeutic world continues to expand exponentially as our awareness and knowledge develops. Each method having value and integrity in itself and giving us therapists a vast range of resources to choose from for our own personal use and for facilitation of our clients.

Yildiz Sethi is a counsellor and Educator who is presently facilitating Family Constellations workshops in Sydney and also facilitating private sessions in her private practice. Family Constellations can be experienced in a workshop or private session and Yildiz is now offering training here in Sydney and is also happy to speak to groups or give demonstrations, where possible of this process for anyone who is interested in knowing more.

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