

Systemic Family Constellations as individual therapy Yildiz Sethi

Therapy has come a long way since Freud's discovery of talk therapy and dream analysis, as a way of resolving repressed fears and anxieties of the subconscious mind and Carl Jung's more acetic approach at resolving inner conflicts using dream or shadow work and the collective unconscious. Shortly following came Adler with his relatively brief and supposedly more practical approach, which included the importance of our place in family and society. With him came the name Family Constellation and an acknowledging of a certain "pecking order" in families. Since those early times we have had the development of at least three very different camps, firstly the science, evidence based approaches of CBT, which have attempted to bring therapy out of the unconscious, esoteric eras of Freud and Jung, into more measureable, scientific methodologies and around the same time, the development of the Humanistic, Existential and Gestalt therapies. The Humanistic approaches attempt to come to terms with the paradoxes of freedom and responsibility, existential givens, integration of emotions and ideas, our ability to find "meaning" and the "I, thou" relationship. Last but not least is the hypnotherapy school, pioneered by the great hypnotherapist Milton Erickson and the more recent developments in NLP, EFT, EMDR and many other modalities that are too many to list.

Intentions of counselling and Therapy.

Some of the intentions of the therapeutic process may be to resolve inner conflicts, improve the ability to relate and to locate and develop resources that raise self esteem, encourage empowerment and change perceptions. Up until now, this has been done mainly in personal therapy, focusing on the inner construction of the individual, with often little consideration 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 1970'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.

Using the knowledge of the innovators

Following on from the great innovations of the work of Erickson, Virginia Satir's "sculpting", Pearle's Gestalt, Primal therapy, Psycho analysis (Freud, Jung and Adler), TA and Family Systems therapy, Bert Hellinger has developed Systemic Family Constellations, which is

based on an archaic Primal Order that he discovered when working with family groups, which he calls the Orders of Love. Systemic family Constellations philosophy takes the view that we are each born as a smaller soul into a larger family soul, that links us in the present, to past generations. This system holds the belief that all members 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?

Systemic entanglements and dysfunctions occur when tragedies, exclusions and denial take place in families. This has the effect of taking away energy from certain members and causing other members; often their children or other relatives, to feel the need to support them, compensate or identify with them or the particular dysfunction, in some way.

According to Systemic Family Constellation philosophy and practice, this is how dysfunction is passed on through generations. Often one person in the present is identifying with the dysfunctional unresolved energy of an ancestor, even though they may not know the person or the history of the family.

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). From here it is possible to tap into the family "energy matrix" and bring to light the entanglement that is affecting the person and allow the person and the family energy to find a suitable resolution. Once a client sets up their issue using representatives in the workshop, a field, which has been called "the knowing field", is set up and the representatives start to notice feelings or mild sensations in their body. From this, new information may arise. The facilitator will then respond to the energy field as the constellation unfolds and new possibilities present themselves. 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 move towards a place of peace with the family soul and "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. Perhaps this is also tapping into Carl Jung's idea of the

collective conscious of families and groups. It is found in a repeatable way, that tapping into the energy of a family via the clients issue, can resolve something for the client and give them a different perspective and often settle the energy of the other members of the group or family as well. After a family Constellation is very commonly for other people in the family group of the client, to report changes in themselves and their perceptions or feelings, even though they may be unaware of one of their family doing a family constellation. So in seeking a resolution for the client, often the rest of the family may notice some positive effects. In fact the main purpose of a Family Constellation is to help the family feel the Primal love that connects them all. Love is a great healer.

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?”

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

It seems there is a place in 2008 to facilitate our clients gaining a reconnection or resolution with their roots and their family soul respectfully, in order to release them from any entanglements and to help them let go of any secondary emotions they may be carrying for other members of the group. 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 is not personally ours. 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 the client may face the world with more strength and optimism.

There also continues to be a place for resolving inner conflicts using CBT or any of the Humanistic therapies, NLP, or Hypnotherapy in order to facilitate change of behaviour, belief or perception and personal development. However with an awareness and the skilled use of both of these perspectives, looking at the bigger picture of the client’s entanglements in their family of origin and then helping them to resolve their inner conflicts, we in the counselling and psychotherapy professions can offer a truly effective, holistic service to our clients. 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.

In 2008 and beyond, more therapists are beginning to see the value of a more integrated approach to counselling and therapy and realizing the value that the pioneering and innovative earlier therapists can offer us in a modern context. We have no need to re-invent the wheel and we can continue to pick styles of therapy according to our personal preferences and to develop a more holistic and integrated approach. However, Systemic Family Constellations continues to develop since its inception and development by Bert Hellinger, in the hands of many renowned therapists all round the world, and is likely to infiltrate many of the new therapies being developed now and into the future. 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.

Bert Hellinger(1999) Acknowledging What is.

Madelung/Barbaera Innecken,(2004),Entering Inner Images Carl-Auer-Systeme Verlag