The ecological impact of macro decision-making on families, who are survivors of torture and trauma

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Father, what's the difference between "a just war" and "just a war"?

"A just war" is one which is being planned and "just a war" is one which has already happened.
The Ecological Model & Social Constructivism

• Uri Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) Ecological Model: a tool for better understanding the Australian cultural context and the multi-faceted complexities of trauma that people bring to counselling.

• The model comprises five environmental systems that are impacting on the development of human behaviours, including historical and cultural dimensions.

• Social Constructivist thinking as a tool to unpack some of the assumptions prevalent in Australian culture and to create spaces for new stories and meanings to be discovered.
The Story gets lost in translation

• Definition of trauma: “overwhelming events outside of the realm of normal experience [which] are encoded, stored, and retrieved differently than are memories for ordinary events.” (Horowitz, 1976; Janet, 1976; van der Kolk, van der Hart, 1991 in Draucker, Martsolf 2006:15).

• Trauma affects a person’s capacity to integrate the experience into their conscious autobiography and sense of self.

• Survivors’ narrative of their trauma becomes fragmented and disorganized (Foa et al, 2007:14).

• Terror such as atrocities, public executions, kidnappings, torture, sexual violations, colonizes people’s psychic space and affects all of their social relationships.

• Family therapy can, with its focus on political, social and cultural contexts, play an important role in the recovery process.
Microsystems

• Comprise the individual’s systems of direct social interactions, such as family, friends, school, work, leisure.

• All social agents within the micro system are influencing and contributing to the development of this environment.

• Four major, currently prevalent approaches to understanding trauma transfer (Kellermann, 2001; Klaric et al, 2013):
  ➢ Psycho dynamic
  ➢ Socio-cultural
  ➢ Family system
  ➢ Biological

• Epigenetic inheritance (Harper 2005)

• The phenomenon of mirror neurons (Klaric et al, 2013)
Mesosystems

• What happens in the interface between family and community?
• Mesosystems comprise “the linkages and processes taking place between Microsystems e.g. the relations between home and school, work place and school” (Bronfenbrenner 1994:40)
• The “impact of two-way communication and participation in decision-making by parents and teachers... [and] the effects of family and school processes were greater than those attributable to socio-economic status or race” (Epstein in Bronfenbrenner 1994:40).
Exosystems

- Exosystems comprise the “linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not contain the developing person, but in which events occur that indirectly influence processes within the immediate setting in which the person lives” (Bronfenbrenner 1994:40).
- For example, Government bodies that decide over Special Child Care Benefit funding applications are part of Exosystems that impact indirectly, but significantly, on the development of children.
Chronosystems

- Chronosystems “extend the environment into a third dimension, [namely, that of time]... [T]ime appears not merely as an attribute of the growing human being, but also as a property of the surrounding environment not only over the life course, but across historical time” (Bronfenbrenner 1994:40).
- Knowledge of the Chronosystems level forms a key component in therapeutic relationship building, multigenerational genogram work and advocacy.
- Neuroscientific research into Epigenetics provides the biological evidence base for the impact of historical events on the development and transfer of human behaviour (Harper 2005).
- Adam Goodes’ war dance.
Macrosystem

• The Macrosystem forms the “societal blueprint” of our culture, comprising “the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems’ characteristics” that are prevalent in our culture, “with particular reference to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life styles, opportunity structures, hazards, and life course options that are embedded in each of these broader systems” (Bronfenbrenner 1994:40).

• The repercussions of the Australian war and the need to unravel the status quo.

• What happens when the dominant ideology denies the survivor’s reality, yet determines the social, political, economic and cultural institutions and policies that impact their lives?

• Coming face to face with an unbearable attitude in our society: we know it’s wrong, but collectively, we do not care!
Translating the story through the language of Heart

• Welcoming refugee families with our hearts.
• The experience of being “deskilled” (Woodcock 1994:6)
• Bearing witness
• A key: Getting to know the family’s cultural belief systems
• The state of limbo
• Social constructivist conceptualizations are relevant:
  ➢ The client – therapist relationship as “dynamic and co-constructed” (Stewart 2009:67)
  ➢ “Culture as ever changing” (Akinyela 2002:40) and constructed
  ➢ Awareness of the effects of everyday racism (Akinyela 2002:36)
  ➢ Welcoming refugee families is a two way street
Translating the story through the language of Heart

• Mobilizing family healing rituals and resources (Stewart, 2009) (Woodcock 1995):
  ➢ Help families incorporate elements of their cultural identity
  ➢ Overcome the state of limbo
  ➢ Shift towards recovery and change
• “To converse with families who have survived is therefore to hold up a mirror to oneself” (Woodcock 1994:6)
• Therapy as “an explicitly political act where there is an exposing of power and a giving of privilege to the special knowledges of the disenfranchised” (Stewart 2009:63).
• The non expert stance of Narrative Family Therapy
Translating the story through the language of Heart

• Telling the story and grappling with meaning making within the context of freedom becomes a power tool for generating change, for reclaiming colonized spaces within their relationships and their selves.

• Effecting change by changing personal meaning systems (second order change) (Stewart 2009:66).

• Genogram work within the social constructivist framework can elicit and elaborate the family’s stories of survival and of resistance, by restoring a sense of being in relationship, which is integral to the meaning making process.
In conclusion

As Harold Ludwick, a Bulgun Warra man from Cape York puts it “If the Constitution was the birth certificate of Australia, we’re missing half the family” (Recognise http://www.recognise.org.au).

Let’s work towards family reunion.
References


References


Recognise, part of Reconciliation Australia. http://www.recognise.org.au
References


