

THE NATIONAL DILEMMA: CAN WE HEAL OURSELVES?

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In a recent article (1) this author attempted to draw parallels between childhood trauma, disturbed adolescent development and the apparent adolescent nature of the current U.S. culture. Is it possible that just as trauma frequently becomes a central organizing principle in the psychological structure of the individual, so too may trauma be a central organizing principle in the psychological structure of the nation?

Is it possible or useful to extend this idea and draw parallels between the manifestations of childhood trauma in individuals and the manifestation of childhood trauma in the national psyche? And if such parallels can be meaningfully drawn, what can we learn from the treatment and recovery of individual and family victims of trauma that might have applicability to a national treatment and recovery process and why should we even discuss such a possibility?

The aim of this paper is to provide some very preliminary and subjective answers to these questions. A case will be made for viewing trauma as one of the central organizing principles within the national consciousness. Attempts will be made to briefly discuss the manifestations of childhood trauma in the individual and possible counterparts of these manifestations within the culture. Finally, aspects of treatment that may be relevant to future national efforts at self-understanding will be discussed along with the justification for even venturing to open up such a discussion.

PSYCHOHISTORY AND CHILDHOOD TRAUMA

In his recent paper on the universality of incest, Lloyd deMause puts forth the hypothesis "that it is incest itself - and not the absence of incest - that has been universal for most people in most places at most

times".. and that furthermore, the earlier in history one searches, the more evidence there is of universal incest, just as the more evidence there is of other forms of child abuse." (2)

This hypothesis is supported by the work of Brett Kahr, who in a paper on historical perspectives on the sexual molestation of children, explores the classical roots of child abuse.(3) Both papers cite dozens of primary and secondary source material and it is apparent that the historical denial of the extent and range of childhood trauma is finally crumbling.

In an important paper that addresses the issue of the historical societal denial of child sexual abuse, Roland Summit makes some telling points: Any gathering of our associates and friends contains people who were molested as children. Every extended family, every neighborhood, every church congregation, every medical society, every class in law school, and most every football team, legislative caucus, and jury conceals people who are hiding unspeakable memories of "unusual" childhood sexual experiences. Those experiences may have been agonizing or ecstatic or a confusing mixture of both, but the fact that they can't be shared says something about our collective fear of finding out.

There is a sad, self-preserving irony about a world that cannot see its own cruelty filled with victims who can't give voice to their pain Projections of any of the prevalence surveys to include elective and dissociative denials would insist that childhood sexual assault is a normative experience, yet we ignore the implications of a society populated with the walking wounded. (4)

As psychohistorians begin to review the distant past and more recent history of different cultural experiences with child maltreatment, it becomes increasingly clear that there has been no racial, ethnic, religious, national, or regional group that is free of the taint of child abuse. The history of the maltreatment of children is a history of the evolution of mankind, an evolution that is still proceeding. (5)

As a result of the now voluminous data on the immediate and long-term effects of psychological trauma, we know that trauma often becomes a central organizing principle in the psychological structure of the traumatized individual. We know that childhood trauma often causes arrests and/or diversions in the course of normal development. A usual manifestation of such unhealthy development is splitting and

fragmentation within the personality organization (6). These splits do not necessarily heal spontaneously once they have occurred. Such personality fragmentation renders the individual relatively incapable of functioning in an integrated way. This means that the intellectual processes are often denied access to the affective and intuitive realms of experience, and both may be cut off from a moral center or sense of purpose, meaning, and value.

Since healthy adult development requires the relatively smooth integration and cohesion of all the parts of the personality, this division of the personality components can easily lead to the existence of extremely regressed or immature personality fragments that seek expression through acting on impulse not thought, the expression of powerful and usually unpleasant emotional states unmodulated by reason or values, and a harsh but inconsistent moral conscience uninfluenced by compassion or reason. Such splitting results in significant intrapsychic conflict accompanied by poor conflict-resolution skills, because of the disconnection between the cognitive capacities and the other levels of function.

The United States is the "melting pot" of the world - E Pluribus Unum: from the many, one. As such, this whole that we call The United States of American, is composed of representatives from every conceivable racial, ethnic, religious, national, regional, cultural background. Likewise we must assume that in so representing all the peoples of the world, all forms, effects, and manifestations of childhood trauma will be evident within the culture.

We know from systems theory that "the mental characteristics of the system are immanent, not in some part, but in the system as a whole." (7) Any collection of individuals is greater than the sum of its individual parts. The system itself can have an identity that is a combination of, but something more than, the combination of the individual identities.

THE CENTRALITY OF TRAUMA TO THE INDIVIDUAL

In his groundbreaking book, Psychological Trauma, Bessel van der Kolk has begun a description of just how central an organizing principle trauma can become in the overall functioning of the individual:

The essence of psychological trauma is the loss of faith that there is order and continuity in life. Trauma occurs when one loses the sense of having a safe place to retreat within or outside oneself to deal with frightening emotions or experiences. This results in a state of helplessness, a feeling that one's actions have no bearing on the outcome of one's life. Since human life seems to be incompatible with a sense of meaninglessness and lack of control, people will attempt to avoid this experience at just about any price, from abject dependency to psychosis. Much of human endeavor, in religion, art, and science, is centrally concerned with exactly these grand questions of meaning and control over one's destiny. (8)

The study of the effects of trauma is still in its infancy. We do know however, that there are factors that effect just how debilitating a traumatic experience will be for an individual and therefore how central the trauma will become as a fundamental part of their psychological makeup. The first and most obvious dimension of stress is the severity of the stressor. There are stressors that will be seriously traumatic for virtually everyone, others that are much more individually variable. Among individuals there appears to be some kind of genetic predisposition that results in a relative vulnerability or invulnerability to the effects of chronic stress. The level of development that the individual has achieved is of profound importance. Generally speaking, the earlier the trauma, the more serious and far-reaching the consequences. It is known that a strong social support system can help ameliorate the effects of trauma, but the relative lack or compromise of such a support system is devastating. The more trauma an individual sustains, the more central the trauma will become as a focus of their experience. A corollary of this, is that the more disturbed the already existing personality, the more likely that a subsequent trauma will have a long-lasting effect. (9)

The intrapsychic mechanism that keeps trauma central is dissociation. Dissociation is defined as:

The segregation of any group of mental processes from the rest of the psychic apparatus. (It) generally means a loss of the usual interrelationships between various groups of mental processes with resultant almost independent functioning of the one group that has been separated from the rest..... In effect, dissociation is the separation of the mind or consciousness by a splitting off of one (sometimes more)

component or system of ideas, the personality or remainder of the mind being unable to exert any control over the split-off portion. (10)

Dissociation is a normal human response to traumatic life events which is initially highly adaptive and probably developed in the course of evolution as a healthy, and as far as we know, uniquely human, coping skill. It allows the overwhelming affect associated with the trauma to be walled off so that under conditions of stress the individual can continue to function and protect itself. However, possibly largely due to social factors, rather than seek expression later, when safety has been achieved and the experience can be integrated into the overall personality schema, the memories and affective content of the dissociated experience is usually repressed.

The individual experiences this repression as a partial or total amnesia for the traumatic events or for the affect surrounding the events. Later, when faced with evidence for the existence of the trauma or its associated affect, the individual will deny any recognition of or even the existence of the trauma. The unintegrated memories or affect, however, will press for expression. DeMause has talked about some force in history that he calls "psychogenesis" which appears to be pushing the species towards improved childrearing from generation to generation.(11) There also appears to be a force within the individual psyche that pushes for integration of whatever mental contents are split off.

Unfortunately, however, the modern individual usually fails to recognize the inherent validity in the need to integrate these split off experiences. Instead of recognizing repeated patterns of traumatic experience, most individuals mindlessly end up repeating patterns which are the real or symbolic reliving of the traumatic experiences. The term given for this compulsion to repeat the past is "the repetition compulsion". No truer statement was ever made than Santayana's: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." (12)

The other negative consequence of dissociation is that it promotes a fixation on the trauma. Normal integrated psychological development cannot proceed as long as there are split off mental contents. As a result, an individual's affect, cognitive processes, and value system may remain fixated at the age when the trauma occurred. This fixation is usually not total, except in cases of severe and repeated trauma, however, and the symptom picture which emerges is one of erratic and

often unpredictably integrated functioning. The individual may cope very well with one situation and yet be completely impaired in another. They may be able to experience a full range of affect at one moment and be numb the next. There may be an extremely inconsistent application of a variably flexible or rigid value system.

A notable characteristic of dissociation is the individual's apparently bland and complete denial in the face of evidence that there may be facets of their mental functioning about which they have no awareness. This has been called "la belle indifference". It allows the individual to hold two completely contradictory ideas at the same time without seeing any contradiction whatsoever, while inhibiting often completely, the ability of the individual to exercise any rational or logical assessment or judgment about the dissociated material.

It must be remembered that the purpose of this defense initially is protective. Dissociation keeps the human individual from being both psychologically and physiologically overwhelmed and paralyzed by the trauma. It is understandable that given the presumably dangerous and difficult course of human evolution, those who were able to utilize dissociation under stressful conditions would have had a distinct selective advantage.

The problem appears to be that evolution did not equip the species with a mechanism just as efficient for overcoming the dissociation once the danger has passed. Without outside intervention, the individual appears to be relatively incapable of discerning that the defense is no longer necessary. Consequently, without psychosocial intervention, the traumatized individual will often endlessly repeat the trauma, will remain fixated at the developmental level of the trauma, will inexorably pass on the effects of trauma from one generation to the next.

THE CENTRALITY OF TRAUMA TO THE NATION

It is the premise of this paper that just as trauma frequently becomes the organizing principle in the psyche of the individual, so too, has trauma become a central organizing principle in the psyche of the nation. This assumes, of course, that there is such a thing as a "group psyche". Psychohistorians have been accumulating evidence for years that supports the notion that it is useful to assume that there are such

things as group fantasies which presumably occur to group psyches and that these group reflections have predictive value and are not random.

If the notion of the centrality of trauma in a group sense is a viable one, then to be consistent with psychohistorical and systems theoretical work, we would expect to see effects on a large group scale that are similar to those we see in individuals. Two levels of group traumatic involvement must also be considered, although no attempt will be made here to differentiate them. The first is the cumulative and combined cultural effects of millions of people, representing every background, most of whom bring with them histories of every form of child maltreatment and other forms of psychological trauma, not the least of which is immigration.

The other level of group traumatic involvement is the repeated traumatic experience of the United States as a whole. Every American shares in, transmits, and participates in the entire group culture and history. This does not mean that EVERY or even MOST Americans necessarily feel the same feelings about every historical event, or are even consciously aware that they are being affected by events, but by virtue of comprising a part of the national identity, we all influence and are influenced by any actions taken in the name of The United States of America. Quantum physics has blown the concept of objectivity out the door and the implications for the models of individual and group consciousness are revolutionary. (13)

Given this assumption, I am going to risk making very broad, sweeping, impressionistic, and certainly arguable statements about some of the events that are contributing to the current "American psyche". Most Americans experience a sense of pride upon hearing the story of the Declaration of Independence and the writing of the Constitution. Likewise, given the right circumstances, most Americans are able to participate in a sense of shame and/or guilt and grief over the treatment of Native Americans, over the travesty that was slavery, over the profound wounding that was the Civil War.

Americans of this century all participate in a culture which has been shaped by the trauma of two world wars, an intervening devastating Depression, and the horror of genocide. Most Americans share, consciously or unconsciously in the guilt for having unleashed weapons of mass destruction into the world. Most Americans share a sense of loss and grief at the assassinations of the Kennedys and Martin Luther

King and all they represented. Most Americans participate psychically in the devastation and despair that was Vietnam. And most Americans born since 1945, at least, share in the ever-present fear and threat of nuclear winter, a possibility that has shadowed every childhood.

From this perspective, let us first look at the factors previously discussed that effect how debilitating a trauma will be to the organism, individual or group. Even if we just look at the national traumatic events the severity of the stressors in the last century are extreme, and each one taken individually would be considered sufficient to cause traumatic stress in anyone. The United States is still a young country compared to virtually every other culture, and as such, these traumas have all occurred during the formative years of our group experience.

A strong support system could have helped ameliorate some of the effects of trauma, but our cultural emphasis on individuality and self-sufficiency has encouraged isolation. Our increased mobility and profit-driven economy has broken up any semblance of social coherence, and many factors have served to destroy the integrity of not only the extended, but now even the nuclear family. In a previous paper I have already briefly summarized the previous traumas that the United States had faced in the first 150 years of its history, (14) so it is safe to say that the Nation came into this century already damaged, already suffering the effects of repeated traumatic experience.

It has already been stated that the mechanism that keeps trauma central is dissociation. Can we find evidence in the culture for dissociation? First of all, Americans are fundamentally indifferent about significant aspects of our own history, and as a result are notably and apathetically apolitical, to such an extent that most of us do not even bother to vote on a regular basis. We also manage to blithely sustain the most absurd social contradictions without generally seeming to even notice. The fact that most of us can walk over a homeless family without making eye contact on our way into the department store to purchase our luxuries is a cultural expression of "la belle indifference".

Another is our preoccupation with violence, our defense of our right to buy - and use - guns, our fascination with killing, blood, gore, murder, rape while at the same time we deplore the fact that we can no longer feel safe walking on our city streets or even sitting safely in our own living rooms. Another is our attitude towards children - we are currently in the process of repealing laws that have allowed abortion on demand

for anyone to serve the rights of the unborn fetus, while millions of children daily are being beaten, raped, starved, abandoned, and neglected and child welfare programs repeatedly suffer mutilative budget cuts. And yet another is our tolerance for the continued existence and deployment of enough weaponry to annihilate the entire world millions of times over.

That these are but three examples of cultural dissociation and not sociopathy is witnessed by what happens when most individual Americans are asked to become politically active or give a political opinion, are asked for a donation for a charitable cause, are asked if they prefer a violent or nonviolent solution to a problem, are offered the opportunity to help a child, are asked for their opinion as to nuclear disarmament. Americans are a fundamentally concerned, generous, caring, and peace-loving people who still believe in freedom, and justice, and truth and all the noble values that the Founding Fathers (and Mothers) promulgated.

For decades now, psychohistorians have been attempting to warn us that, as an entire culture, we are repeatedly in the grips of the repetition compulsion. This compulsion to repeat our national traumas and our fixation on trauma helps to explain why we seem to have so much difficulty solving social problems that given our combined wealth and intelligence should be fairly easily solvable. The more an individual repeats trauma, the more the individual sinks into a vicious cycle of despair, helplessness, and hopelessness. As a nation, we seem stuck in just such a vicious cycle about the problems that face us. Like the patient who has finally exhausted themselves and either gives up or gets help, we do not currently even seem able to summon up adequate leaders who can lead us out of our circle of abuse, but we haven't quite reached the point that we recognize that we need help.

EFFECTS OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA ON INDIVIDUALS

The ways in which individuals manifest the effects of traumatic experience that is unresolved, are manifold and form a fairly complete list of psychiatric symptoms. To begin the list, most will complain of some degree of depression characterized by an increasing inability to experience pleasure, loss of capacity for a wide range of feelings, an inner emptiness accompanied by feelings of helplessness and

hopelessness, difficulties sleeping, eating, concentrating, ultimately leading to suicidal despair and often suicide attempts - and sometimes death.

Free-floating anxiety and panic attacks are another sign of underlying dissociated traumatic memories and affect. The anxiety becomes particularly uncomfortable if the underlying memory is aroused by some association to the traumatic experience. A defense against this anxiety and depression that initially works and then becomes a problem on its own is substance abuse. As the traumatic memories press for release, the substance abuse may increase creating yet another dangerous and potentially lethal vicious cycle.

If the substance abuse route is ineffective or unsatisfactory, there are many other compulsive behaviors that will serve the designated purpose of warding off unpleasant affect and memories. These include compulsive eating, working, shopping, gambling, starving, bingeing and purging, exercising, seducing, TV watching, self-mutilating, beating, stealing, raping, killing. The range of human compulsive behaviors is probably limited only by the range of possible human behaviors.

Many trauma victims suffer from psychosomatic illnesses or experience all kinds of somatic pains, some of which are dissociated bodily memories of the trauma. Animal evidence supports that trauma also lowers resistance to disease including cancers.

Animal data also supports that violence begets violence. Certainly among the human species there can be no doubt of this. Trauma victims are more likely to behave violently towards themselves or others, including their children.

EFFECTS OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA WITHIN THE NATION

As a nation, we rarely seem to feel very good about ourselves, and psychohistorians have seen recurrent images of depression in the mass media as symptoms of a recurrent group fantasy. (15) We seem to need increasing stimulation in order to feel much of anything. When faced with problems of national policy or need for major change, we repeatedly demonstrate an overwhelming sense of helplessness and hopelessness, as if, no matter how hard we try, nothing can be really be done about poverty, violence, family disintegration, or drugs. With our

continued rampant destruction of our environment, our cities, our social support systems, and our family structures, a serious case could be made for our suicidal intent, without even having to look at our preoccupation with weapons of individual and mass destruction.

Cultural anxiety is not a new phenomenon. For years this has been the Age of Anxiety. Now and again we have a panic, fearing that we are about to all die, either through AIDS, or get poisoned headache pills, or too much beef, or carcinogenic food additives. But as in individual panic, we seem to do relatively little to get to the underlying cause of the fear, we just move on to the next fear.

Or, even more commonly, we medicate ourselves. Americans take more tranquilizing substances per capita than any other nation on earth. Of course, part of the reason for that probably is that we can get them. The substance abuse problem, in this country as everyone knows, is a major crisis and the War on Drugs is showing no signs of being won by drug enforcement agencies. We will take anything from diet pills to banana skins if it helps us not feel uncomfortable feelings.

But, the list of national compulsions is certainly not limited to addictive substances. It would not be easy to find an American who is not compulsively addicted to some kind of behavior, down to the national pastime of spending money on material goods at the shopping malls. It is UnAmerican to save or even give money away when we all need to live on credit to keep the economy primed.

We don't read, converse, or create, we channel-graze. We eat much more than we need to eat in order to sustain life and health. We are addicted to being entertained and rarely find ways to entertain ourselves or each other - precious few families still even know how to have conversations with each other, much less tell stories, play games, or work on projects.

We are too busy working to have time for friendships or family, or even our own creative outlets. We climb the ladder to success compulsively without even knowing what we are climbing to reach. We are preoccupied with staying young, staving off old age and presumed decrepitude, and spend a great deal more time, energy, and money trying to get our bodies to look better than our minds to work better.

Despite all the obviously unhealthy things we do, we are immensely preoccupied with health and illness, although more so with physical

illness than with mental illness, which is still seen as residing in "the other guy not me".

And of course, we have a horrible fascination for anything violent - a fascination that is a national obsession. We make and watch movies about it, view nightly television shows about it, listen to songs about it, read books about it, listen to talk shows about it, masturbate to magazines with pictures of it, have sex to videos about it, and most importantly, perpetrate it. We are violent with our wives, our husbands, our parents, our children, our friends, our bosses, our employees, our neighbors, and of course, to the usual strangers and foreigners.

TREATMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL TRAUMA VICTIM

Just as the study of the effects of trauma is still in its infancy, so too is the study of the treatment and recovery process. It is possible, however, to begin outlining some basic premises about treatment and speculate as to their applicability on a larger scale.

The treatment of the effects of childhood trauma in the adult patient is fundamentally a process of reparenting. By definition, the personality is fragmented into relatively healthy and relatively immature parts. There is usually little awareness of the internal splitting, a fixation of development at the level of the trauma which is denied or misunderstood, and various compulsive defenses which help ward off unpleasant affect and are, by definition, in some manner self-destructive.

Transactional Analysis has provided us with a convenient method for distinguishing between different parts of the personality.(16) In distinguishing between the "Parent, Adult and Child, Berne has made more accessible the three divisions that psychoanalysis has traditionally termed: "Superego, Ego, and Id". In the interest of following along developmental lines, I intend to collapse the Parent and Adult functions into one "Adult" who "coexists", with the "Inner Child", and an "Adolescent" who helps keep the two of them separated.

In the person who has been traumatized as a child, the Adult, the Adolescent, and the Child usually function in a disconnected, adversarial fashion. It is the "job" of the Child fragment to contain all the memories

and feelings of the traumatic experience, totally or partially cut-off or dissociated from the Adult.

It is the "job" of the Adolescent to defend the Adult against input from the Child and to protect the Child from too much input from the Adult. This adaptation permits the Adult to function sufficiently to allow the individual to survive, but as stated before, the dissociation prevents further integrated development and fixates the person at the level of the trauma.

An understanding of the unique contribution that adolescence plays in human development is crucial here. In individual development the adolescent phase is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood. Erik Erikson called the adolescent mind a "mind of the moratorium, a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood, and between the morality learned by the child, and the ethics to be developed by the adult". (17)

According to Erikson, the developmental tasks of the individual adolescent are to: ...maintain the most important ego defenses against the vastly growing intensity of impulses...; to learn to consolidate the most important 'conflict-free' achievements in line with work opportunities; and to resynthesize all childhood identifications in some unique way and yet in concordance with the roles offered by some wider section of society. (18)

Adolescence is also a time when the individual begins framing questions of life's meaning and purpose. Throughout normal adolescence there is a progressive movement away from narcissistic preoccupations and towards involvement in one's social sphere, away from selfishness and towards altruism. Over time, healthy adolescent moral development follows a parabolic curve, starting with a pro forma acceptance of parental standards and beliefs, progressing to various challenges and tests of those same beliefs, and culminating in an assimilation and accommodation between parental beliefs and actual adolescent experience.

Adults who are traumatized as children are developmentally trapped in adolescence. Since one of the essential tasks of adolescence is to "synthesize all childhood identifications", the Adolescent self of the trauma victim cannot progress any further. It is not possible to merge an identity as helpless victim with an identity as empowered and

competent adult without "parental" guidance or a socially-approved and parentally-led ritual process.

People who are arrested in adolescence suffer from what Erikson termed "identity confusion" (19). Such individuals suffer from seriously impaired capacity for sustaining relationships and intimacy. Relationships tend to be overly intense attempts at merger and subsequent loss of identity, but are usually short-lived and breakdown under the demands of reality. There is a diffusion of time perspective with a denial or warding off of the implications of aging often alternating with a sense of being already old, or already dead.

There is often a serious impairment in the capacity for commitment to work, an inability to concentrate, an arrest in creativity. Often there is the resort to a negative identity as a choice better than no identity at all, an outcome common among substance abusers, gang members, prostitutes, and other kinds of delinquents.

Most traumatized adults physically survive adolescence but chronological age does not necessarily bear any relationship to emotional age. Although legally adults, victims of childhood trauma will usually have some degree of identity confusion, although they may not recognize it as such. Their Child and their Adolescent selves have not merged into an adult identity but remain very separated and inimical to each other.

Individuals may arrive at an adult age with symptoms already present for many years, often since adolescence. Or, symptoms may emerge triggered by various life events that become developmental impasses, such as marriage, childbirth, job promotions, or parental death.

Whatever the triggers, the Child begins or continues to press for release of the memories and affect, presumably because there is some "force" within us that pushes for growth and development. On a physical level we understand this force as genetic programming. On the level we are presently discussing, this force is less tangible and yet apparently no less powerful an evolutionary dynamism. There is reason to believe that this "force" may be related to deMause's "psychogenesis" and may have something to do with a deeply ingrained desire for the better survival of one's offspring and ultimately, the species.

The more "noisy and obstreperous", demanding of attention, crying for soothing the Child becomes, the more the Adolescent must defend the Adult against this input by using many different kinds of compulsive addictive behaviors that serve to distract the thinking Adult away from the affect and memories. The Adolescent "must" resort to this defensive behavior because, from the point of view of the Adolescent, survival is at stake. The Adolescent perceives the dissociated feelings and memories as a very real threat to the existence of the individual as a viable entity.

An understanding of the dimension of Time is important in this context. Trauma stops the clock. Every traumatic experience is a little death, whether it is death of a dream, death of an illusion, or death of a hope. The arrest of the flowing nature of time keeps fragments of the personality trapped in time, functioning under the exact same prohibitions that went into effect at the time of the trauma, even though, according to present time, the traumatic circumstances are long past.

The dissociation occurred originally to prevent the individual from becoming overwhelmed by feelings, and therefore psychically and physically paralyzed, a catastrophic state that can easily lead to rapid demise of the organism. Because time has stopped, as far as the Adolescent is concerned, the threat to self-annihilation is a real and present danger and must be warded off. The Child, just wants the pain to stop, wants to be taken care of, wants to be comforted and soothed. The Adult, capable of logical reasoning and intent on reaching mature goals is assaulted helplessly by the feelings and desires of the child and the often profoundly disabling defenses of the Adolescent.

It is within this context that treatment must occur. Adolescence is considered the final stage of childhood. This being the case, adolescents still require parenting, although a kind of parenting substantially different from the parenting required by younger children. The corollary of this is that people who are arrested in adolescence - and a case can be made that this description encompasses most of us - still require a parenting function.

Ultimately, the Adult must take over responsibility for that parenting function, both for the Adolescent, the Child, and their own offspring. However, by definition, the historical adolescent did not get the parenting required to transit through that developmental period and

therefore the Adult has little learning or experience in HOW to adequately parent.

The role of the therapist becomes one of parent, teacher, mentor, advisor. The therapist must model behavior and actually teach parenting skills to the Adult, while setting clear and firm limits on the acting-out and compulsive behavior of the Adolescent, and protecting, comforting, and nurturing the Child.

Under optimal circumstances, as the Adolescent begins to trust the therapist, there will be less perceived need for that part of the self to bear the burden of keeping the Adult and Child separated. Adolescents will fill a power vacuum with their own ego when necessary but they are always, albeit, secretly, grateful when a power stronger and hopefully healthier, than theirs steps in to assume the burden. This movement allows the Child to more directly and clearly express affect and communicate memories, which permits the Adult to begin to cognitively understand what is going on, as well as how and why the system evolved in the first place.

As a result, the formerly rigid and often punitive barriers between the parts of the self ultimately drop and integration between the tripartite self can occur. Internally this is experienced as an Adult self who can think clearly and rationally, who has developed an expertise in peaceful problem-solving, who can actively and lovingly parent when called upon to do so, and who holds flexible but clear beliefs, standards, and a sense of life purpose and meaning. At the same time, still existing within, but no longer carrying on a separate existence is the Adolescent, who may be the source of continued creativity, surges of growth, enjoyment of sexuality, ongoing push for newer forms of identity, and continuing questioning of the social order.

The Child remains within as well, but no longer trapped in the past, the Child now becomes able to laugh and cry, engage in imaginative play, and participate in a sense of universal wholeness which may very well lead to explorations of deepening spiritual values, beliefs, and experiences. Although the internal healing process is probably similar, individual therapy is certainly not the only way that people have reparenting experiences. Therapy is just the instance in which reparenting is or at least should be, the defined agenda. But many individuals benefit from parenting experiences with teachers, ministers, mentors, other relatives, peer groups, and self-help groups. Many

people also have parenting experiences with spouses, siblings, friends, and co-workers, but this is usually more complicated and may cause other problems due to the confusion and overlap of roles and role expectations.

THE CASE FOR NATIONAL THERAPY

Does the Nation need help? Is there evidence of pathology? If so, who can help us? And help us do what? No sane human being could think that we don't need help - and apparently most Americans do recognize the problems. In a recent book, Patterson and Kim review the results of a survey they compiled on the belief systems of 2,000 Americans who they considered to accurately represent a cross-section of the United States' population. (20)

In their book they arrive at fifty-four conclusions about current American values and experience. These include a recognition that America has no moral leadership, nor do we have any respect for our political or moral leaders or much hope that they are going to improve. We have no heroes. There is no moral consensus - we are very confused about what is right and wrong and tend to do what is expedient.

The incidence of violent crime is actually much higher than the crime statistics indicate - apparently 60% of Americans have been victims of a major crime. One of every seven has been sexually abused as a child. The rate of sociopathy is increasing dramatically.

Lying has become an accepted part of our culture and we will lie, cheat, steal, murder, abandon our families, and change our religion if offered enough money to do so. Alcohol is our number one addiction, although 40% of us have used drugs and 20% still do. Many of us admit to violent often sexual thoughts that we are not always able to control. We have sex often before age 13, we often rape or are raped, we do not believe in marriage or community. We don't like who we are and want to change various facets of our identities physical and emotional.

Very interesting as well is the observation that although Americans are quite pessimistic about our national destiny, we do not feel that this will personally effect us. As individuals, we feel that we are going to be just fine. This is a classic example of the extent to which we are dissociated

from our own inner core, our sense of connectness with all that surrounds us.

Clearly, even the average American knows exactly what the problems are, problems that are all characteristic of a culture that appears to be stuck in its adolescent phase, healthy enough not to regress into a chaotic childhood, but disturbed enough to be unable to move towards healthy and integrated adult development.

But where do we go for help? Where are the "parents", the "therapists" who can move us out of our impasse? To paraphrase Pogo, "We have seen the parents and they are us". It is highly unlikely that some "deus ex machina" from above or beyond is going to step in and rescue us. We are going to have to do it for ourselves. So where do we begin?

First of all, we must have a willingness to learn from each other. I am ceaselessly astonished at how arrogant people are about their presumed knowledge of human nature. Countless times I have heard people say that they don't "believe" any of this "psychology" stuff, as if we were discussing the existence of ghosts or UFO's. A dash of humility wouldn't hurt us at all.

We must stop distracting ourselves with questions of blame. It is important to define the problem so that we know what we are trying to solve. Whose fault it is, is basically irrelevant. Most large problems, by definition, have multigenerational causes, so whoever is to blame is probably long dead anyway. It is worthwhile to examine historical patterns because they help us become aware of the repetition compulsion. But the more one understands history, the more apparent it becomes how each event is interconnected and multibranching.

Whenever a problem surfaces we seem to spend more time discussing whose fault it is than trying to solve the problem. It really doesn't matter whether it's the fault of the Republicans or the Democrats, the fact is most Americans do not believe that the politicians they elect will tell them the truth about anything. It is impossible to figure out whose fault it is, but violence against women, children, and men in this country is perpetrated largely by men, and it will require changes on the part of both men and women to stop it. Instead of pointing the finger at each other, labor AND management are going to have to realize that they are both in trouble and both must take responsibility for solving the problems of American industry. It is irrelevant whose fault poverty is -

poverty exists, it is extremely damaging to human beings and it must be eliminated, an undertaking that will require the combined efforts of ALL of us.

If we can worry less about being blamed, we may get a little more comfortable with TELLING THE TRUTH. Is General Schwarzkopf an American hero because he "won" the Gulf War or because he dared to tell us the truth about the horrors of war and dared to show the truth of his own personal pain on national television?

As Patterson and Kim's survey shows, virtually ALL (91%) of us admit to lying regularly (21). Vaclav Havel is perhaps the most eloquent spokesperson on the subject of lying and the alternative "living in truth":

Individuals can be alienated from themselves only because there is something in them to alienate. The terrain of this violation is their authentic existence. Living the truth is thus woven directly into the texture of living a lie. It is the repressed alternative, the authentic aim to which living a lie is an inauthentic response..... Under the orderly surface of the life of lies, ... there slumbers the hidden sphere of life in its real aims, of its hidden openness to truth.

The singular, explosive, incalculable political power of living within the truth resides in the fact that living openly within the truth has an ally, invisible to be sure, but omnipresent: this hidden sphere. It is from this sphere that life lived openly in the truth grows; it is to this sphere that it speaks, and in it that it finds understanding. This is where the potential for communication exists.....

When I speak of living within the truth, I naturally do not have in mind only products of conceptual thought, such as a protest or a letter written by a group of intellectuals. It can be any means by which a person or a group revolts against manipulation....

The essential aims of life are present naturally in every person. In everyone there is some longing for humanity's rightful dignity, for moral integrity, for free expression of being and a sense of transcendence over the world of existence. Yet, at the same time, each person is capable, to a greater or lesser degree, of coming to terms with living within the lie. Each person somehow succumbs to a profane trivialization of his or her inherent humanity, and to utilitarianism. In everyone there is some willingness to merge with the anonymous crowd and to flow

comfortably along with it down the river of pseudo-life. This is much more than a simple conflict between two identities. It is something far worse: it is a challenge to the very notion of identity itself. (22)

If we can stop blaming each other and begin to bear hearing, knowing, and telling the truth, we will begin to feel again - and at first, we will not like what we feel. My own awareness of child abuse has grown out of a recognition that for years of my clinical practice I had been systematically blind to something, to the very real and extensive abuse of children. No one was to blame for my blindness, I wasn't even to blame for it. But once I became aware of it, it became my responsibility to cure my blindness.

To do so I have had to listen, know, and speak the truth about what I have learned. To participate in the truth, any truth, means to allow oneself to FEEL as well as to KNOW and this has been and continues to be, an extremely painful and demanding task. But it is what we must do as individuals and as a Nation. We must stop denying the pain of our neighbors and ourselves and allow ourselves to feel the hurt, anger, and grief over the tragic events of our own individual pasts and our collective past. We must remember, through being honest with ourselves and being honest with our history, all the injustice and pain that has been inflicted upon us and which we have inflicted upon each other. Within every victim there is a perpetrator, and within every perpetrator, a victim.

This is a task that we cannot do alone. In over a decade of clinical and business decision-making, I cannot recall one single good major decision that I made alone. With issues as complicated as the ones mentioned in this paper, individual solutions are not possible. Only representative group decisions are meaningful and worth trying. But the group process MUST be representative, and at present, few - if any - of our major problem-solving bodies are truly representative of our population.

In a dysfunctional family system, it is frequently the most obviously symptomatic member of the family, often the adolescent, who becomes the change agent for the family. That "identified patient" or "family scapegoat" in the jargon of the times, is the one member of the family who frequently has the most active conflict between the Lie and the Truth within. This is the basic reason for symptom formation - expression of symptoms means that they are having difficulty keeping a

lid on the conflict. The identified patient embodies the family lie and the family truth.

Parallel to this finding, it is the most symptomatic members of our society that embody the most active conflict between the truth and the lie, and it is within the reality of their recovery that we may find some important national guidelines. for recovery. We need honest leaders who will come forth and guide us. It must become a priority that leaders have already HAD effective psychotherapy, rather than that they must resign from office if they have sought treatment. But we also all need a "Twelve Step" recovery program to empower us to take responsibility for our own lives and to help us recognize that our lives HAVE become unmanageable and that, alone, we are powerless to fix them. We also need such a recovery program to keep us honest and humble -there is nothing like a "searching and fearless moral inventory" to keep us from getting too judgemental about our neighbor - and about ourselves, and the process of "making amends" makes continued denial of feelings virtually impossible. (23)

A RECENT EXAMPLE? : HILL VS. THOMAS

Is such a "national therapeutic process" conceivable or even practical? Is there any precedent, any examples within our own experience, of a nationally experienced self- examination procedure?

For a weekend in October, 1991, a significant proportion of Americans were glued to their television screens, much like the winter before. Only this time the issue at hand was not the thrill of military combat, it was a war of the sexes played out around the issue of sexual harassment. The woman in the case, Anita Hill, claimed that the man in the case, Clarence Thomas, had sexually harassed her in the past, making him potentially unfit to hold an office as important as Justice of the Supreme Court. What made this scenario so important was that these were not just two individuals with a controversial past behind them. It was Republicans vs. Democrats, Conservatives vs. Liberals, Topdog vs. Underdog, Man vs. Woman.

Much like what goes on in a dysfunctional family when there is a secret that needs to be told, someone had leaked the information about the case to the press and suddenly the full glare of public attention was focused on a private hurt, a private lie. Accused and perpetrator sat

facing self-styled judges, only no one could figure out who was definitely the accused and who definitely the perpetrator.

In the beginning of the hearings, the onlookers were exposed to a graphic portrayal of sexual misconduct in a manner far from titillating. Americans squirmed in their chairs, but listened, as the rawness of human pain was exposed. For that brief time, we were all in the therapist's chair, forced to bear witness to the person's recounting of her own story, her own dread. And then we listened as the distinguished jurist completely denied her allegations and with righteous indignation that most of the audience shared, railed at the panel for exposing their private life to public spectacle.

The senators squirmed in their seats too because unwittingly they found themselves in the extremely uncomfortable position of needing to be therapists when they do not know how to do anything but be judges in this setting. They tried to ask questions, tried to probe to discover the underlying truth of the experience, some even tried to empathize with the accuser, others with the accused. But given the supposed purpose of the hearings, given the importance of the question - to decide whether Judge Thomas was fit to become a Justice of the Supreme Court, the hearings rapidly degenerated into finger-pointing, character assassination, political polemics, and party politics.

All of us were faced with the inevitable dilemma of every therapist - what IS the truth, what IS reality, what DID actually happen? But because this was not therapy, but politics, the onlookers were not able to do what the therapist must do in this situation which is to set aside the need for judgement and allow the process to unfold, allow the truth of each individual's personal experience to be witnessed, understood, and transcended by them.

The goal of the judicial process is to establish right and wrong and to mete out punishment for those judged wrongdoers. The goal of the therapeutic process is to heal splits within the individual, within the family, perhaps within a nation. The judicial process requires an assignment of Truth. The therapeutic process recognizes that truth is in the eye of the beholder and that Truth is most closely approximated by the summation of all the individual truths.

It is no wonder, therefore, that everyone would be extremely uncomfortable with the process, that a judgement would be prematurely rendered, that the process would be terminated without reaching any meaningful conclusions, that all would degenerate into blaming and shame. The main protagonists left the field bruised and probably permanently scarred without an adequate resolution of the issues between them. But was there anything positive that the rest of us can derive from the experience? Was there anything of significance that occurred during those few days that may have far-reaching consequences to the group psyche?

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the whole weekend was the fact that so many people switched off football games, movies, and all the usual forms of television entertainment and tuned in to the hearings, transfixed, many even late into the night. Is it because we are a nation of voyeurs? The actual explication of the sexual details of Anita Hill's story were much more clinical than arousing. If anything, people were made more uncomfortable than they were entertained by her elaboration of her experiences, as was emphasized repeatedly by the press and by individuals.

Was it just the public spectacle of two black people recounting or denying details of their sexual life? Or was it that Americans are, at some level, hungry for national and public dialogue on issues of substance? What was unfolding on our television screens was a portrayal of the relationship between American men and American women to which virtually everyone could relate. Viewers were uncomfortable but still drawn to the process, forced to reflect, at least internally, on their own experience with sexual harassment.

And while the individual viewer weighed the arguments back and forth, he or she saw our government leaders, all white men of considerable power and influence, openly and publicly listening to the fervent complaints of a woman who was a highly credible accuser. At the same time, the viewer saw our government leaders sympathizing if not empathizing with the accused, a powerful and successful man not unlike many of them, but for the color of his skin.

The Senate panel represented every imaginable style of response when confronted with their own discomfiture. Some blamed the woman and sided with the man. Some believed the woman with a certainty and condemned the man. Some patronized her, some empathized with her.

Some were puzzled, some surprised, some indignant. Some looked guilty, some were angry, some afraid. All appeared embarrassed, confused, and awkward with the entire proceedings. At least briefly, the panel epitomized white male authority attempting at least to begin some strenuous self-examination. And all sat guilty of being part of a body who has excepted themselves from harassment laws the rest of us must follow.

When the Senators conveyed the hearings, they apparently had not fully realized that they were opening up a deep and pus-filled national abscess. Once Anita Hill began to testify, she became an embodiment of the fear and hatred of women and all that is feminine, that typifies a large segment of Western and certainly American culture. Anita Hill gave women across the nation the courage to come forth and share their own experiences of sexual harassment with their husbands, their children, their friends and lovers, their co-workers, their bosses, their employees.

By their own confusion and befuddlement, and by their willingness to listen, the Senators themselves gave men permission to listen to those women, to weigh their charges, even to empathize with the victims. For each man on that panel who took the opportunity to look at his own lack of awareness, he gave millions of men permission to look at their own. As Clarence Thomas sat there, accused rightly or wrongly, millions of American men sat there with him, knowing in their own hearts the extent of their own culpability, admitted or not.

There is no question that the whole thing was handled awkwardly and probably unfairly. As a nation we have not discussed how a process such as this should, in fact, be conducted and few if any people have a clear idea of how to handle this kind of a situation with dignity. It would be unfortunate, however, if the conclusion drawn from all this is that matters of this nature should be kept strictly behind closed doors and let out for the public only when properly washed and sanitized, with all the emotional truth of the experience expunged.

Abscesses can only heal when they are lanced, when the pus is allowed to flow out, and the wound cleansed. Sexism is only one of the many American psychic abscesses that are crippling to healthy function. Pus is smelly and disgusting. Lancing an abscess can be an extremely painful process but when an abscess is left to fester, the result is increasing disability and pain. As a nation we must learn to tolerate the discomfort

of such psychologically "surgical" procedures in order to achieve healing and recovery.

WHY BOTHER?

It may be that a complete definition of a healthy adult has yet to be written, but Erik Erikson certainly contributed to the defining process. He described an adult as someone capable of intimacy - "the capacity to commit oneself to concrete affiliations and partnerships and to develop the ethical strength to abide by such commitments, even though they may call for significant sacrifices and compromises." (24)

He also described the mature adult as capable of generativity, the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation, either directly through one's own offspring or through applying special gifts in other directions to benefit mankind. Generativity is a synonym for productivity and creativity.

Erikson also talks about "ego integrity", an emotional integration which permits participation as a follower as well as acceptance of the responsibility of leadership. The individual who manifests ego integrity is one who knows that for him or her "all human integrity stands or falls with the one style of integrity of which he partakes." (25)

Humankind is at a crucial, even evolutionary turning point. In 1968, Stanley Kubrick in "2001: A Space Odyssey", pointed to some kind of higher power or meaning directing the species to some kind of change in consciousness. Quantum physicists are describing a universe quite different from the Newtonian world that most of us grew up in, a world in which all matter, animate and inanimate is intimately connected into a whole, in which the future effects the past as well as the past effecting the future, in which there very well may be an ordering proclivity or "power" that surpasses the wildest imagination of the medieval philosophers and in which human consciousness may be the ongoing creative force. (26) Simultaneously, hundreds of thousands of survivors of trauma are overcoming developmental arrests and moving into full adult development by assuming responsibility for themselves AND turning themselves over to the care of a "Higher Power".

When asked in an interview whether he saw a grain of hope anywhere in the 1980's, Vaclav Havel replied:

I should probably say first that the kind of hope I often think about (especially in situations that are particularly hopeless, such as prison) I understand above all as a state of mind, not a state of the world. Either we have hope within us or we don't; it is a dimension of the soul, and it's not essentially dependent on some particular observation of the world or estimate of the situation. hope is not prognostication. It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart; it transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons. ,,,, I feel that its deepest roots are in the transcendental, just as the roots of human responsibility are.... Hope in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, but (is) rather an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed. The more unpropitious the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the deeper that hope is. ... in short, I think that the deepest and most important form of hope, the only one that can keep us above water and urge us to good works, and the only true source of the breathtaking dimension of the human spirit and its efforts, is something we get, as it were, from "elsewhere". It is also this hope, above all, which gives us the strength to live and continually to try new things, even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do, here and now. (27)

Many signs point to the possibility of a significant change in human consciousness, a possibility of a step out of stalled adolescence and into adult functioning. But what is the alternative? We know what happens to trauma victims who stay fixated in trauma. Suicide is a very real possibility. Slow self- destruction is even more likely resulting in the demise not only of the individual, but also a spread or contamination of the effects of the trauma across and down through the generations.

On a National level, this should be a terrifying possibility. We have the weapons of total species and global destruction at our fingertips. But if we choose a slower route by just staying on the path we are now traveling, we will pollute and exhaust our environment to such an extent that the world we pass on to the next generations will be literally and irreversibly contaminated.

We are the richest, most powerful Nation on earth. We are the longest and most far-reaching social experiment. We are completely free to choose which path we want to travel. We can go through the pain of remembering, of feeling, of grieving for our lost and illusionary

childhood and allow oneself to learn to reason and behave as a grownup. In doing so, we can choose to assume moral responsibility for leading the world - since we represent the world - towards a brave, new world. Or, we can do nothing and become just another of Nature's failed experiments. I, for one, hope we are just too damned curious to just go on repeating the past.

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