



Principles That Support Healthy Family Function

Background: Systems Theory and Family Therapy

Many of the core ideas behind systemic constellation work were mapped out decades ago by family therapists drawing on systems theory and cybernetics. Back in the 1960s, Ludwig von Bertalanffy introduced general systems theory to psychology and the social sciences, planting the seeds for a new way of understanding human behaviour: not just as individuals in isolation, but as parts of interconnected systems.

This shift gave rise to the idea that a family is more than just a collection of individuals. It's a dynamic, living system shaped by intergenerational influences and governed by certain natural principles:

- **The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.** A body isn't just organs stuck together, and a family isn't just a list of names. It's how the parts interact that matters.
- **All parts are interdependent.** A shift in one member affects the whole. Think of the ripple effect when someone in a family is excluded—perhaps due to shame, grief, or a painful secret. The absence leaves a gap that subtly reshapes the entire system.

Organic systems like families (unlike machines) aim to maintain balance. This is called **homeostasis**. It's the same principle that causes the body to sacrifice circulation to the extremities in extreme cold to protect vital organs. Not ideal for your fingers, but good for survival. Similarly, in families, one member might be unconsciously sacrificed to preserve the system. Family therapy tries to find better options.

Several schools of family therapy laid the groundwork for what would later become systemic constellation work:

- **Structural Family Therapy** (Salvador Minuchin) defined what a healthy family structure looks like and showed how simply shifting seats in a therapy room could shift the system itself. His "orders" have a clear echo in Hellinger's "Orders of Love."
- **The Milan Group** (Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, Prata) focused on patterns repeated across generations and saw the family's problem as a shared one, not just an individual issue.
- **Strategic and Brief Therapy** grew from the work of the Palo Alto Group (Bateson, Jackson, Watzlawick, Weakland), with Jay Haley and Milton Erickson taking it further. They examined how problems were maintained by communication loops and interaction patterns.

Together, these pioneers expanded therapy beyond the individual psyche to include relational dynamics. Symptoms like anorexia could now be seen not simply as pathology, but as expressions of systemic imbalance. Through reframing and mindful representation, therapists can gently open new perspectives, creating space for healing images to emerge—images where love can flow again.

Mindful Representations and Natural Order



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Mindful representations bring these systemic dynamics into vivid relief. They don't just show what's happening now; they reveal **transgenerational patterns** quietly shaping us from the past.

Here we bump into the concept of natural order.

Understanding the natural order is wisdom. Joining in with it with love is humility.

Nature has structure, and we ignore it at our peril. Ferns thrive in temperate rainforests. You can grow one in the desert if you must, but it'll cost you a fortune in water, effort, and patience. Why not plant a cactus instead and use your spare time and money for something more fun?

When we respect the natural order, life flows better. We suffer less. Families, like bodies and forests, flourish when they're allowed to follow their innate logic.

Bert Hellinger once said that the struggle of love to rise above the natural order is the beginning and end of all tragedy. Strong words, but they capture something important: love without order gets tangled. Order without love goes cold. We need both.

The human body offers a perfect metaphor. It only functions when its systems are integrated and working together. Lose a toe, and your gait changes. That might lead to hip pain, then spine misalignment, and eventually a heart under strain from lack of exercise. Everything is connected. This same insight applies to families, communities—any living system.

Modern medicine is finally catching up with what systems thinkers have long known. **Network physiology** is a new field that studies how bodily systems interact rather than treating organs in isolation. Instead of separate specialists for each bit of the body, we now see value in looking at the whole web. (See Ivanov, Zhang et al., 2019, *Applying a network perspective to human physiology*.)

Likewise, just as physiologists study integrated body systems, family therapists and constellation practitioners explore the structure and flow of family systems. Over time, we've discovered some surprisingly simple natural laws that help love move more freely through families—when we let it.

A Final Word

Systems don't flip like a switch. They evolve—slowly, unevenly—guided by fresh insights, anchored in old habits, and shaped by quiet experiments that test what might work better.

Some patterns are so common they almost go unnoticed until we pause and observe them. Others stretch back through generations, weaving old loyalties and unspoken grief into today's choices. Still others stay firmly entrenched, slow to budge no matter how much insight we bring—until something stirs, and new possibilities begin to open.

The work of systemic constellations doesn't just make these patterns visible—it gives us a way to engage with them. A way to notice, to honour, and sometimes, to change.

It's not always tidy. But it's deeply human. And when it works, love begins to move again—gently, surprisingly, and often in directions we hadn't expected



Five Principles That Support Healthy Flow within a Family

Some principles that support healthy family function are:

1. **Inclusion of all who belong to the family system (The fellowship of fate)**
2. **Resolution of Divided Loyalties**
3. **Each family member carries their own weight (their own guilt, merit and emotions and no-one else's)**
4. **Balance of give and take**
5. **Nurturing: Older members nurture younger ones**
6. **Gender Energy Balance**

These principles can then be summarised as the principles of inclusion, carrying, balance and nurturing.

1. The Principle of Inclusion

The first principle is the principle of inclusion. The principle of inclusion states that everybody in the system needs to belong and to be really included. We have discovered that when someone is excluded, even if they have just been innocently forgotten, then everyone else in the family system also suffers. When someone in a family is excluded somehow the rest of the family unconsciously compensates. This compensation maintains the integrity of the family system but the remaining individuals pay a price for this by, carrying something that does not belong to them - just as the knees, spine and heart are adversely affected by the damage to the toe in the example above.

This is a principle that also occurs in more complex biological systems. Aldo Leopold, a young forest service employee in New Mexico in the early 1900s had the job of killing

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However he started to notice that as the wolves died off, the deer population boomed and they ate all the vegetation. Much later, in 1995, wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park. After the wolves returned the deer and elk became stronger, the aspens and willows were healthier and the grass was taller. The wolves chase the elks who run faster and gets fitter. Their running hooves rough up the soil allowing more grasses to grow. The wolves kept coyote numbers down. Because coyotes eat small rodents, more of these were available for food for the big raptors like eagles and Osprey. The whole system returned to a healthier balance because of the re-inclusion of the previously excluded wolf!

This phenomenon is known as a trophic cascade. (Gruner 2001). It refers to the benefits tumbling down through an ecosystem when a predator is reintroduced at the top. A short video about the reintroduction of the wolves to Yellowstone National Park can be found on the BBC website called [How reintroducing wolves helped save a famous park](#).

In family systems exclusion is usually motivated by grief that is too painful to bear or by divided loyalties.

Peter's experience gives us an example of how important inclusion is within family systems. Peter came to a workshop saying that his wife complained he didn't really connect to her. Even though he



didn't really understand exactly what his wife meant, he knew her complaint was serious and threatened their marriage. Moreover, Peter did not know why he could not follow through with his business ventures. As a result, other people seemed to make much more money out of his good business ideas than he did.

When we asked about his family, Peter gave a quite full picture but left out his paternal grandfather altogether. He forgot him! When asked specifically, it turned out that Peter's grandfather died when Peter's father was only three years old. His untimely death left a trail of unresolved grief and financial hardship behind him. The pain was so great that the family stopped talking about Peter's grandfather.

The unspoken rule, not to speak about the grandfather, had such hypnotic power that Peter was unaware that he had left him out of his family narrative until I specifically asked him. The bad effects of this unresolved grief in Peter's family went through the generations impairing family members' capacity to connect and to thrive.

While Peter's grandmother suffered from a huge grief, she still had to get on with raising her children without the support of her now dead husband. Peter's father missed out on being raised by his own father and had to take on adult responsibilities, at far too young an age, in order to support his mother. This was too much for everyone and the whole family became numb, as survival needs took precedence over their huge emotional needs.

Having grown up in this emotionally numbed environment, Peter's father was not able to be fully emotionally available to his wife and children. This consequently affected Peter and his siblings. They didn't get the full emotional support and strength that they needed from their father. It just wasn't there. This then caused problems in Peter's relationships and he had no idea that the problems started with the premature death of his grandfather. In fact, he knew almost nothing about his grandfather, because no one ever spoke of him. That was too painful for Peter's father and grandmother to discuss because of their unresolved grief.

Through this forgetting, the family paid another huge price. It lost the resources that would have been passed down through the grandfather. In this case, the grandfather was a very good businessman and he came from a line of very good businesspeople, but the family couldn't talk about that and take pride in it because the unresolved grief stopped them. Any attempt to talk about grandpa would only serve to make them feel miserable. Sadly, the family lost the strength of that lineage as long as the grandpa was largely forgotten.

The good news is that we can repair that damage even two or three generations later by giving the grandfather a respectful and honourable place while still acknowledging the grief and suffering and courage of those left behind to carry on. Such an act frees Peter to better connect to his wife and children as well as to thrive in his life. It also frees him to reconnect with his grandfather's business acumen and the family tradition of being good at business. A simple ritual done in the setting of a mindful representation energised Peter to start the practical implementation of his business ideas.

There are many ways members of the family system can be excluded or forgotten. This always seems to have adverse consequences regardless of how positive, negative or insignificant a family



member might be. To be able to spot this we need first to be aware of who belongs in the family system. This group of people has been known as **the fellowship of fate**.

The Fellowship of fate

1. The children, including stillborn children and those who have died early,
2. The parents and their siblings,
3. The grandparents,
4. Sometimes one of the great-grandparents and, at times, ancestors even further back.
5. Everybody - and this is most important - who made room to the advantage of the above members. This includes, in particular, former partners of parents or grandparents, as well as all those whose misfortune or death brought the family an advantage or gain.
6. People linked by shared life and death experiences
 - i. Victims of violence (including accidents) and murder by any members of the family.
 - ii. Perpetrators of violence (including accidents) and murder of any family members
 - iii. Fellow participants in disasters involving death and or serious injury

This includes the obvious members of the family: intimate partners (husband/wife/lover), children, parents and their siblings, brothers and sisters, grandparents, sometimes great-grandparents and at times, ancestors even further back.

We need to make a special point of remembering those who are more likely to be excluded or forgotten. These are those who have died early, including stillborn children and others who may not have been fully acknowledged including those adopted into or out of a family, biological relatives of adopted children and disgraced family members.

The fellowship of fate also includes anyone who made room to the advantage of the above members. This includes former partners of parents or grandparents, as well as all those whose misfortune or death brought the family an advantage or gain.

Also, anyone who is linked to the family by intense life or death situations becomes part of the fellowship of fate. This includes people in wars, natural disasters and serious accidents where other people die around them or they die along with others. Victims of violence and murder by any members of the family are included under this heading as are people who have saved the life of a family member. All of these people also need to be acknowledged and given a respectful place.



Everybody in this fellowship of fate needs to be given a respectful place. Sometimes this is very difficult, especially if that person has done something terrible, like murdering an innocent person. This becomes a little easier when we understand that true respect demands that the people concerned carry the full weight of their own actions. It is not actually respectful to a person to pretend that they have not done what they actually have done, even if their deeds were terrible.

When we include the excluded people in family systems, it is very similar to what we do when we practice mindful meditation. In mindful meditation we also need to hold all the unpleasant and difficult experiences that we have, in an open and kind awareness. When we do that within ourselves, we become more complete, more skilful and more relaxed. When we do it with the members of our family system, we get similar results. It takes us to deeper more unconscious levels because it engages us with the larger system of our family that may even go back several generations. This ultimately supports us and makes our lives and our here and now mindfulness practice easier.

2. The Principle of Resolving Divided Loyalties

Divided loyalties are particularly tricky and often are superficially resolved by excluding one of the people or elements that are competing for loyalty. This can show up quite strongly in both migrations and adoptions. It can also occur when there is a lot of conflict and disrespect between the parents and the children feel forced to choose one parent over the other.

In the case of migrations divided loyalties often exist between the country of original and the new country. With adoptions the divided loyalty is between the biological parents and the adoptive parents. The problem of divided loyalties begins with the false idea that one needs to be selected over the other. That is an impossible choice. The immigrant needs both countries and the adopted child needs both sets of parents. The children of split parents need both parents - even if it is just to come into existence in the first place.

This may not seem true when one country or one parent is highly dysfunctional and even toxic. However, the need for these is a biological imperative. The complete rejection of a country of origin or a parent is profoundly undermining.

The **resolution comes from acknowledging the essential contribution made by all parties**. Without both biological parents none of us would exist. Similarly, without being born and raised in a particular part of the planet none of us would exist. However, the continued survival of the adopted child depends on the adopted parents and the continued existence of the migrant depends on the adopted country.

Fortunately, when we set up a mindful representation, the sense of divided loyalties tends to dissolve once the essential contribution of the different parts is fully acknowledged by all parts. That includes the adoptive parent's acknowledging the birth parents for given their child life and the biological parents acknowledging the adoptive parents for caring for the children when they could no longer do so. a similar process often happens between countries with migration.

This does not involve making up fairy stories. If a parent has been abusive and toxic or completely absent that needs to be acknowledged too. It might come up in a representation with the sentence.



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You are my father and you abused me. “or “You are my mother and you abandoned me.” And the representative of the child may go on to say something like “And you are still a part of me” Of course there may be more work that needs to be done before such a challenging sentence can be uttered in a way that gives the child strength.

Another common divided loyalty is between a current partner and a past partner especially if the person’s past partner is the parent of children with that person. The resolution involves a similar process there too.

3. The Principle of Carrying One’s Own Weight

The third principle that supports the healthy flow of love in families is the principle of carrying our own weight. The principle of carrying our own weight states that each individual family member needs to fully embrace and carry their own individual burden that life has given them. Good and bad things happen to us all, tragedies and wonderful strokes of good fortune. We all make good and bad decisions. Sometimes, some of us act heroically and sometimes, some of us act in terribly shameful ways. When an individual avoids facing up to their own guilt, shame or grief, someone else in the family system ends up paying the price later on. Guilt and merit belong to whoever earned them.

In the example of Peter given earlier, Peter’s father did not face his grief about the early death of his own father. In fact, this is almost impossible for a child to do, if the adults around him are avoiding the grief. In this family Peter’s older brother, Paul, spent most of his life feeling an inexplicable sadness. He also felt pulled towards death. This manifested in both a serious drug addiction and the habit of dangerous driving. Paul had done years of therapy and had overcome his addiction but still struggled with the sadness and the dangerous driving.

Peter then he did a simple ritual where he imagined his father standing at his grandfather’s grave. In this ritual he said to his father “I have been carrying your grief for you all of my life out of love. Unfortunately, this hasn’t helped either of us. So please bless me if I now give it back to you with the deepest of respect.” In his mind’s eye, Paul saw a spontaneous kind smile appear on his father’s face. Immediately, Paul felt a relaxation in his breathing and a new lightness in his body. Over the next two years he gradually struggled less and less with sadness and his driving settled down.

When members of our larger family are excluded or forgotten, or when someone carries emotions that belongs to someone else in the family system it has a bad effect on everyone in that system. When we carry emotions for someone else in our family system, they do not resolve like other absorbed emotions. This is because that emotion needs to be carried by the family until it resolves at its point of origin. The examples given below will make this point clear.

If we are carrying and unresolved emotion for someone else in our family, we are not able to process our other emotions in normal healthy ways. It is as if the absorbed emotion acts like a form of static that obscures our clarity.

One young woman (Karen) I saw suffered from a feeling of being excluded wherever she went. This was despite the fact that she was quite competent and likable. Nonetheless, her



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beauty was somehow hidden by a physical awkwardness. She was in fact excluded from many of her family activities and she never felt comfortable with her peers. Karen also suffered from chronic anxiety.

It turned out that this woman's father had been adopted. His biological mother had fallen pregnant out of wedlock very young to an older and successful man of high social status. He abandoned her. Suffering from disgrace and deep shame she adopted out her son. As a result of this story my patient's biological grandmother was excluded and forgotten. It seemed as if Karen was carrying the fate of her biological grandmother. She was being excluded like her grandmother was and she seemed to be carrying her grandmother's shame. Remember that shame can cause clumsiness. So Karen's physical awkwardness and low self-esteem were caused by the shame she was carrying for her grandmother.

I did two pieces of mindful representation work with Karen. The first was in a group setting, using representatives to stand in the place of family members. In this piece of work her biological grandmother was given a respectful place and the sense of exclusion was dealt with. After this Karen found herself included in family gatherings and her relationship with her father improved dramatically.

The second piece of work was done eighteen months later with Karen alone using visualisation. In this piece of work Karen respectfully gave the shame she had been carrying back to her grandmother. Karen had a spontaneous and surprising reaction to this. She immediately felt stronger and the grandmother she visualised also looked stronger and gazed at Karen with a warm smile. Very quickly Karen began to feel more at ease with her peers and her low self-esteem evaporated. She also began to move much more gracefully.

Derek was a young man I saw who an ex-heroin addict was. He had been off drugs for about 10 years and had had many years of therapy. Nonetheless he was still not living up to his potential, and his relationship with his very successful father was very strained. He was very intelligent and creative but his chronic sadness debilitated him. All his therapy hadn't helped this issue much at all.

Derek's grandfather had died when his father was only 8 years old. His father wasn't really able to grieve effectively so he gritted his teeth and made himself strong. When he grew up, he became a very successful and well-regarded businessman. When I got my patient to visualise his father and grandfather he immediately started crying. As he handed his father's grief back to him my client settled and became visibly lighter. From that moment on my patient strode forth into establishing his own business and his relationship with his father relaxed and became much more enjoyable.

These are examples of the simple rituals, which can heal after a transgenerational issue has been revealed.

As we reflect, we can begin to understand family connections, broader social connections and connections with nature more deeply. As we experience mindful representations, this intellectual understanding is transformed into a lived felt sense. This makes it possible to



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open to the experience of being part of the greater whole in a way that feels nourishing, supportive and creative.

In mindful representation workshops we can deal with difficult situations like this. We can leave absorbed emotions where they belong and we can find a good place for ourselves within our families, where we can feel a good sense of belonging whilst retaining our creative individuality. We can also observe and become much more relaxed with our emotions and become more skilful in the way we deal with them. We can learn to distinguish between essential emotions, reactive emotions and transmitted (absorbed) emotions. Then, rather than feeling threatened or besieged by our emotions, we can experience them as being truly adaptive, as being trustworthy friends and allies that enrich our lives.

4. The Principle of Balance

The fourth principle that supports the healthy flow of love in families is the principle of balance. This principle states that there needs to be a balance of give and take between intimate partners (i.e. husband and wife). In most adult relationships there needs to be a balance of giving and taking for the relationship to thrive. When we take more than we give we have a natural reaction of feeling guilty. This feeling drives us to restore the balance.

The field of evolutionary psychology recognises this principle as fundamental in regulating human interactions. Freeloaders present a threat to cooperative human systems. If there are too many freeloaders, families, organisations and even countries collapse into chaos. [Boyd & Richerson, 1988, 1992](#); [Hauert, De Monte, Hofbauer, & Sigmund, 2002a, 2002b](#); [Panchanathan & Boyd, 2004](#)). Consequently, freeloaders are punished and excluded. Maintaining a balance between giving and taking protects us from freeloaders. It also protects us from becoming a freeloader. Is very important for our survival because groups exclude freeloaders.

When we take more than we give, we feel guilty. This feeling of guilt is a very useful emotion as it warns us that we are in danger of being excluded. In a relationship between adults, the giving and taking needs to be in a movement toward equilibrium.

As humans we are social animals whereby each of us needs the protection of the larger group in order to survive. Modern cities have created an illusion of independence. This illusion is quickly exposed when we consider how well we would survive without all the people who make sure water comes through the taps and who ensure that our food is grown and delivered to nearby shops etc. In fact, in cities we are more interdependent with other humans than we ever have been before in the history of humanity and our supportive group is no longer restricted to a tribe of about 500 people but extends to billions of people around the planet. In fact, this interdependence also includes animals and the whole biosphere that supports our existence. And it appears that to survive well in this wonderful biological system that we need to balance what we give to and take from this larger system.

Often couples get into trouble with balance when they stop valuing the other's contribution. There isn't a simple mathematical formula to say that this much housework is worth that much office work or that this much time with the children is worth that much time organising a holiday. It can become



very easy to undervalue our partners contribution. If we are hard at work dealing with office politics during the day, it is easy to imagine that a partner is having a breeze at home playing with children. On the other hand, if we are at home all day dealing with housework and dealing with children's joys and tantrums without much adult conversation, it becomes easy to imagine that office work is a day full of excitement and witty banter. In complicated human relationships, balance of giving and taking requires goodwill and communication.

5. The Principle of Nurturing

The fifth principle is the principle of nurturing. This principle states those who came earlier give to those who come later. The most important example of this is that parents give and children take.

This principle is well recognised by family therapists. When a child is looking after the parent, we call this parentification of the child.

If the parent is weakened, as in the case of Peter's father there is a grave danger that the child will become stuck in a parentified role. This makes the child look very mature, but this is an illusion. In fact, it prevents the child's proper emotional maturation. When parentified children grow up, they are often unable to tolerate distress in themselves or others or become rigidly stoic with a loss of natural spontaneity. They often look to their own children for emotional support thus continuing the cycle of parentification of children.

Children step into this role out of love for their parents and because their own survival depends upon it. Imagine a child of a heroin addict who makes sure there is food in the fridge and who calls the ambulance when her mother accidentally overdoses and is in danger of dying. This is an extreme example. Subtler forms of parentification are much more common. If it occurs temporarily when a mother is sick with the flu then it doesn't cause any harm. When it becomes entrenched, it has significant harmful consequences.

Sometimes therapists can help families reverse parentification of young children. They do this by giving the parents more support so that they do not need to look for the children to support. They then encourage the parents to step up physically, financially, socially and emotionally.

Many of us are partly emotionally parentified. Because this happens from a very young age, it just feels normal. It is extremely common in therapists. One of my early mentors humorously identified it as "the neurotic need to be needed." On the positive side this can show up as an uncanny ability to empathically tune into others' needs. On the negative side, it shows up as a slightly tacky desperation to be helpful, even when help is not wanted. At its very worst, I have seen parentified therapists bully clients into feeling intense unpleasant emotions such as anger or distress so that they can then step in and rescue them!

People with a neurotic need to be needed have grown up as children emotionally supporting their parents. They learned to tune into the needs of others by tuning into their parent's needs. They got very good at it as children because their emotional survival depended on it. They also learnt not to burden their parents who could not cope with that. This means that they do not feel comfortable expressing their own needs in a relaxed way. They are not able to receive nurturing from others. They push it away without even realising they are doing it. They tend to reject even simple offers of



help – like someone offering to open the door when they are carrying a box. Instead, they will go through the difficult process of opening the door for themselves!

Once we recognise that parentification is defining our relationships, we can start to undo it by making more effort to tune into our own needs, express those needs and ask for help or accept help when offered. This is a long process of habit change.

The forces that cause the parentification in the first place can be addressed by reflecting on our parents in context. As we do that, they come off Mount Olympus. It then becomes easier to accept whatever they did give us, whatever the price. This principle of nurturing can then be honoured. It requires a radical step of acceptance of whatever happened in their lives. Simple rituals such as those that occur in Mindful Representations can greatly assist with this process.

Most therapists are emotionally parentified. They learned to tune into the needs of others by tuning into their parent's needs. They got very good at it as children because their emotional survival depended on it. However, most therapists do not feel comfortable expressing their own needs in a relaxed way. This can be dealt with. The solution to parentification arises when those who come later allow themselves to receive from those who came earlier, whatever the price. This principle of nurturing must be honoured. It requires a radical step of acceptance of what happened. The ground needs to be prepared for this step as has been discussed earlier on.

In representations the healing of parentification involves acknowledging what is behind the parent that has weakened them. It may be abuse that they experienced or a heavy fate for the family like being caught up in war or serious illnesses or early deaths. Seeing that allows us to recognise that it is not ours to fix. One traditional move is to bow before the parent and their fate and as you come up from the bow you usually sense that instead of feeling bigger than your parent you now feel smaller than your parent. This act of humility allows us to fully accept the gift of life that comes through our parents. The we can receive and thrive in a relaxed way.

6. Gender Energy Balance

The flow of life depends on masculine and feminine energy working together. However, in many families, masculine energy and feminine energy seem to be at war. Life still flows in those families but there is an enormous price to be paid for it.

Men mostly carry the masculine energy and women mostly carry the feminine energy but this isn't always the case.

When feminine energy is devalued women are demeaned, bullied and excluded. This bullying is often overtly aggressive with physical violence. When masculine energy is excluded men are demeaned bullied and excluded. In this case the bullying is often more hidden in the form of gossip and other forms of subtle undermining. Masculine bullying is like a bomb. Feminine bullying is like a cloud of toxic smoke.

When this type of war is occurring, everyone suffers. In representations men often get their masculine strength from a line of male ancestors behind them and women get their feminine



strength from a line of female ancestors behind them. When this energy is flowing well the opposite sex usually finds the line of strength inspiring and they rejoice in it. That is a sign of healthy gender energy balance. Sometimes a line of male ancestors needs a female ancestor amongst them to give some gentleness to their nurturing. Sometimes the female ancestors need a male ancestor amongst them to give extra clarity.

As you can see there is plenty of space here for men who carry a lot of feminine energy and women who carry a lot of masculine energy. The point is that the flow of life needs both. And it is better for everyone when they are working well together while respecting their differences.

Summary

When members of our larger family are excluded or forgotten, or when someone carries emotions that belongs to someone else in the family system it has a bad effect on everyone in that system. When we carry emotions for someone else in our family system, they do not resolve like other absorbed emotions. This is because that emotion needs to be carried by the family until it resolves at its point of origin. The examples given below will make this point clear.

If we are carrying and unresolved emotion for someone else in our family, we are not able to process our other emotions in normal healthy ways. It is as if the absorbed emotion acts like a form of static that obscures our clarity.

One young woman (Karen) I saw suffered from a feeling of being excluded wherever she went. This was despite the fact that she was quite competent and likable. Nonetheless, her beauty was somehow hidden by a physical awkwardness. She was in fact excluded from many of her family activities and she never felt comfortable with her peers. Karen also suffered from chronic anxiety.

It turned out that this woman's father had been adopted. His biological mother had fallen pregnant out of wedlock very young to an older and successful man of high social status. He abandoned her. Suffering from disgrace and deep shame she adopted out her son. As a result of this story my patient's biological grandmother was excluded and forgotten. It seemed as if Karen was carrying the fate of her biological grandmother. She was being excluded like her grandmother was and she seemed to be carrying her grandmother's shame. Remember that shame can cause clumsiness. So Karen's physical awkwardness and low self-esteem were caused by the shame she was carrying for her grandmother.

I did two pieces of representation work with Karen. The first was in a group setting, using representatives to stand in the place of family members. In this piece of work her biological grandmother was given a respectful place and the sense of exclusion was dealt with. After this Karen found herself included in family gatherings and her relationship with her father improved dramatically. The second piece of work was done eighteen months later with Karen alone using visualisation. In this piece of work Karen respectfully gave the shame she had been carrying back to her grandmother. Karen had a spontaneous and surprising reaction to this. She immediately felt stronger and the grandmother she visualised also looked stronger and gazed at Karen with a warm smile. Very quickly Karen began to feel more at ease with her peers and her low self-esteem evaporated. She also began to move much more gracefully.



christopher walsh

Peter was a young man I saw who an ex-heroin addict was. He had been off drugs for about 10 years and had had many years of therapy. Nonetheless he was still not living up to his potential, and his relationship with his very successful father was very strained. He was very intelligent and creative but his chronic sadness debilitated him. All his therapy hadn't helped this issue much at all.

Peter's grandfather had died when his father was only 8 years old. His father wasn't really able to grieve effectively so he gritted his teeth and made himself strong. When he grew up he became a very successful and well-regarded businessman. When I got my patient to visualise his father and grandfather he immediately started crying. As he handed his father's grief back to him my client settled and became visibly lighter. From that moment on my patient strode forth into establishing his own business and his relationship with his father relaxed and became much more enjoyable.

These are examples of the simple rituals, which can heal after a transgenerational issue has been revealed.

In representation workshops we can deal with difficult situations like this. We can leave absorbed emotions where they belong and we can find a good place for ourselves within our families, where we can feel a good sense of belonging whilst retaining our creative individuality. We can also observe and become much more relaxed with our emotions and become more skilful in the way we deal with them. We can learn to distinguish between essential emotions, reactive emotions and transmitted emotions. Then, rather than feeling threatened or besieged by our emotions, we can experience them as being truly adaptive, as being trustworthy friends and allies that enrich our lives.