

(The Gender Centre advise that this article may not be current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.)

The Value of Support and Community

Reaching Out and Being Vulnerable

by Anthony Carlino

Article appeared in Polare magazine: July 2011 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015



Anthony Carlino

During my training a number of years ago, I was part of a group and invited to participate in a guided process using our imagination. While closing our eyes, the facilitator encouraged us to imagine a time in human history from the past. A time when there were fewer walls between people. A time when human beings gathered food and ate collectively, families slept at night in the same room together – what you did, who you were, your qualities were more visible to others. The troubles you carried were much harder to hide. The moments of personal triumph were there for others to celebrate. Peoples lives were shared with one another.

When we take the risk to try something different, to reach out and be vulnerable in the presence of another, we potentially learn another way of being in the world.

Using our imagination, we moved through the time of industrialisation and the notion of private property. As more buildings went up, so did the number of walls. I started to know less of you. Your house was your house, your food was your food. People began to talk to each other less and less about who they are and their experience of the world. Community became less figural, and the notion of the individual moved to the fore.

What struck me during this process as I imagined living in different periods of human history was that the closer we got to the modern age the greater the sense of isolation I felt. From a time when I felt supported by those around me because we knew one another, we progressed to today where our numbers are far greater, but our sense of connection has in many areas greatly diminished. Where once my sadness and distress was more likely to be shared with others, the chances of this connection is far less. We are often encouraged to fear those we do not know, to hold privacy above openness and not risk showing our humanness to others. Human beings are more isolated from one another on this level than any other time in history.

It does not surprise me then, nor to those who understand the value of community and support, that Depression has been identified by the World Health Organisation as one of the leading causes of disability on the planet and affects 121 million people worldwide. ^[1]

In a world where we are so often encouraged to do things on our own, it can be so hard to reach out for support and to talk to others about what is happening for us. This difficulty can be further compounded when we have received the message, covertly or overtly, that sadness and tears are a sign of weakness. The tragedy in all of this is that we are encouraged to place the expression of very human and important emotions in a box that we keep to ourselves. We are asked to be less human.

Within this dynamic, where intimacy and openness are not supported, there can be shame experienced in seeking support. I "should" be independent. I "should not" be weak. These external messages and others just like them we take on as our own and in turn, give our inner-critic free reign to criticise ourselves if we break them.

When we take the risk to try something different, to reach out and be vulnerable in the presence of another, we potentially learn another way of being in the world. For some of us, this support can come from family, friends and loved ones. It can also be experienced through the development of a trusting relationship in counselling. We can learn that our pain and sadness is not something to be ashamed of but rather, an important part of being human. No emotion is good or bad. Emotions simply are what they are, and their expression plays a hugely important role in our sense of well-being.

Polare Magazine is published quarterly in Australia by The Gender Centre Inc., which is funded by the Department of Family & Community Services under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to

make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.