

How to Cope with Social Polarization

Personal Perspective: The gift of mutual learning.

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Posted on PSYCHOLOGY TODAY, August 16, 2024



"Aikido: The Way Of Harmony"

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"Mutual learning happens in the entropy; we need the confusion to release the new." —Nora Bateson

In a previous post, "*The Purpose of Conflict*," I wrote, "What we can learn is to embrace conflict. To do so depends on an emerging curiosity, where the eventual tending to the needs of others is paramount." It's a continuous process of using a wider lens to encourage collaborative learning, unlearning, exploring, and improvisation. These are challenging times with much at stake for future generations. Social anxiety is at its highest level in years. It affects all ages and seeps into our

everyday cultural institutions. The main question is how to diminish polarization's barrage and negative psychological consequences.

In that post, I proposed several questions to address the conflicts that produce polarization. It is time to revisit and update them with suggestions to mitigate and resolve these everyday challenges:

Is it time to listen and tend to each other through non-adversarial forums that go beyond imposed fragmentation and separateness?

We live in an age of presenting differences that have been expanded and weaponized through social media. Distortions and untruths are perpetuated creating anger and violence. Our political, legal and even religious institutions have not been able to bridge the gaps of distrust. The need for forums originating at the grassroots level is more than ever needed. Different points of view have existed since the founding of our country. They are not new, but when these views are based on imposed fears, misperceptions, and assumptions that haven't been discussed in a non-adversarial manner it perpetuates division and discord.

There are many opportunities to discuss these differences, the one that I am most involved with is "Warm Data" (reference 2.) developed by Nora Bateson, president of the International

Bateson Institute which provides a safe small group discussion process to mutually learn and share "information about the interrelationships that integrate elements of a complex system." This process encourages cross-contextual story-telling and dialogue based on the unique needs of participants. They can be, as in nature, simultaneously messy and beautiful. However, there is little room for dichotomies that have little validity.

A Warm Data session for example could start with an introductory story shared by someone about a reaction to an article or advertisement that describes personal attacks amongst political parties. The theme of the small break-out sessions can be for instance, "What is combining, or continuing from this story." Each group will discuss the theme within suggested contexts such as family, economy, education, employment, and media. Another grouping can dialogue the presenting theme through, for example, parenting, religion, library, and conflict. After a certain amount of time, the groups will be reassigned and mixed to have a dialogue within a new set of contexts. Consequent large group sharing can be about what was mutually learned. The process is "...a living kaleidoscope of conversation in which information and formulation of cross-contextual knowing is generated..." In this instance, the result is how political discourse and social polarization will be bridged through the different interfacing contexts. This allows for a realization of how a sense of interdependency can help respond to difficult issues.

How can we not share concerns and attempt to enlighten those who feel they have nothing to lose?

In the martial art of aikido (reference 3.), for example, harmony can be attained by weathering opposing views. It is an expression of our faith in humanity to embrace even the most powerful attacks, to find a space to connect and produce a unifying sense of interdependency. There is much to gain from a win-win volley that fosters collaboration. This surpasses the traditional view that compromise is a goal of unification. Someone loses with compromise. Life cannot coalesce towards vitality in this manner; it needs to savor the unseen and unheard needs that emerge from mutual learning to support our interdependency.

How can mutual learning enhance our relationships and mitigate misunderstandings?

All systems can be maintained in a way that respects desired differences. Dialogue that allows discussion across and within different contexts, i.e., family, media, economics, education, etc. creates a process that supports holistic consequences from understanding that the whole is more than the sum of the parts. This can be described as "trans contextual," how all contexts are interrelated. We only need to look at the consequences of narrow thinking, which distorts

information to produce unequal distributions of wealth, poverty, war, discrimination, and environmental problems. These are the consequences of decisions made in isolation, with little collaboration. This trying time will benefit from allowing for mutual learning as individuals share everyday needs.

How can we strive to tend and care for ourselves and each other?

It is imperative to be well to heal, mend, and care. Self-fulfillment consists of having an ecological "zooming in and out lens." It is a personal perspective tool to see the wider interactions that celebrate and encourage our interdependency. This is a prerequisite to creating supportive environments that include mindful practices, meditative breathing, and healthy sustenance.

These goals are driven by sharing how to adjust the disproportionate control of resources. Our aesthetic talents will be free to improvise and create active patterns representing the needs of those involved. This results in a healthy contagious energy dissolving animosity and allowing for seamless ever-expanding interfacing of other collaborative contexts.

The essence of the above fosters harmony through the infinite possibilities resulting in intimacy. Best friends, shoulders to lean and cry on, joyful synchronicity, and verbal and nonverbal interactions. This includes mutual learning and unlearning through collaborative win-win volleys that release what has been previously dormant. The information then rises between our relationships through thoughtful transitions and stochastic outcomes. It's the wildness of nature's intent to occasionally pause and gather what is available to each of us to be in a state of "readying" to share and care for each other.

References

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