

The Value of "Warm Data"

How to curtail the fear and anxiety that engulfs us.

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Posted on PSYCHOLOGY TODAY on July 22, 2022

KEY POINTS

- To cope psychologically and physically during these trying times, people cannot attempt to fix society's concerns in isolation.
- Mutual learning and sharing of stories can help mitigate polarization and its ensuing violence.
- The process of "warm data" helps people navigate elements of a complex system and begin to see solutions to society's adversarial problems.

We are fallible,
of constant
temptations,
adapting to
injurious patterns,
yet if you trust
by expanding
your contexts,
learning to unlearn
from the unheard,
then the ebb and flow
of nature's interdependency
will offer direction

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The above poem was motivated by the inspiring *Unpsychology* magazine's summer 268-page issue about warm data. I highly recommend it (free download: <https://www.unpsychology.org/>). Included in this issue is an article of mine that is a response to the shared concerns of many

families I am counseling, as well as my own social networks.* It addresses the many hurdles facing us regarding the intense polarization in our society, for which there seems to be little solution.

This polarization is manifested in attacks on our freedom to make choices, fear for our safety, gun violence, racial/ethnic/diversity profiling, varied behavioral responses to the pandemic, and an increase in the intensity of anger. The consequences are patterning parallel historical examples that have resulted in the demise of democracy.

Unfortunately, another consequence is the impact on our nervous systems, creating an epidemic of sympathetic “fight or flight” reactions. What that produces is a collective energy that sabotages the vagus nerve (our nerve of security and compassion) and compromises immune systems of all ages.



“Heart-to-Heart” Source: © Natasha Rabin,
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How do we cope psychologically and physically when we know that attempting to fix these concerns in isolation is futile? It only delays resolution and allows the injurious consequence of blaming victims. As irrational as it is, it is repeated over and over on certain popular media, yet the elephant in the room is beginning to become too clumsy to hide.

What are we to do to curtail the fear and anxiety that engulfs our families and, disproportionately, the most vulnerable in our society? We can start by not buying into narrow cause-and-effect reasoning fostered by self-serving personalities, and by sharing our everyday concerns with others through stories that describe our unique lives. That is a powerful beginning. It is likewise important to create safe, non-adversarial forums to mend,

care, and tend to the resolution of the pattern of polarization and ensuing violence. We are part of nature's ecological process, and regardless of our political and cultural beliefs, are interdependent.

Questions to help us rise above fear and anxiety

Here are some prompts and suggestions to be posed to soothe our vagus nerves and rise above the fear and anxiety gripping our communities. (After each prompt, ask, how is it not happening?)

Since effective learning is a mutual process and emanates from our relationships, we should explore how we are educating our children. On any given weekday during the school year, those between the ages of 5-18 are housed in educational settings between approximately 7:30 to 3:00 (not to mention ages 18-22 in college). This is a source of how our youth will view America. What are the learning contexts in these educational settings? Do they offer a framework that is not dependent on standardized testing? Are there opportunities where children and adults mutually learn and help each other? How do grading or competitive atmospheres affect collaborative social skills? Are traditional separate subjects taught with an emphasis on how they interrelate with the real world or how nature works? Are there forums for school/family/community collaboration? Is there an emphasis on non-competitive and collaborative learning?

How would it be if caring about what needs to be tended to in our society was a priority? How does the vast disproportionate distribution of wealth affect the ability to live a comfortable, sustainable life? In what ways is survival, not as just fittest or privileged, connected to contemporary violence, crime, etc.? How does adversarial animosity create judicial and political dissociation from respecting women's rights, social equity, racial justice, and the American experiment of democracy?

How can we start at the local level to address climate issues and the need for regenerating our environment? Are there forums to address alternative forms of energy, nutrition, and health care? Should the failed consequences of rising health and economic problems be of concern to families, therapists, and those pledged to mediate these issues? How can we uphold our laws and democratic foundation? How urgent is it for rising social and political dysfunction to be taken seriously?

Given these obvious stressors, and that there now is a countdown to the destruction that can't be stopped by Captain Kirk having Scotty right the ship, what will it take to create positive effective changes?

It is my sense that it will take discussions and shared stories in non-adversarial forums. It is the re-learning of how nature works in its messy yet beautiful essence before even she is destroyed by not tending to her meadows and creatures. There is a framework worth looking at and practicing that offers solace to the above concerns (Here is the link to the *Unpsychology* magazine issue: <https://batesoninstitute.org/warm-data/>). It is called "warm data."

What is warm data?

Developed by Nora Bateson, president of the International Bateson Institute, "warm data is information about interrelationships that integrate elements of a complex system." It is driven by a process that is described by her as "symmathesy," and which generates "mutual learning through the process of interaction between multiple variables in a living entity."

When shared narratives are contextualized, we can create the opportunity to improvise and experience evolving possibilities to many of the above-mentioned concerns. The outcome is that these possibilities offer a segue to seeing our interdependency as it exists in nature, yet is seldom respected. It is a systemic learning process that understands how the whole is more than the sum of its parts, counter to the prevalent cause-and-effect thinking that is at the root of our adversarial problems. Rather than trying to fix the different parts of our world in isolation, which doesn't allow them to be in relationships, it encourages understanding how each context is simultaneously part of wider or "transcontextual" levels. For example, "depression" can be seen in its complexity which is interconnected to economics, employment, lifestyle, social support, etc. rather than an isolated label.

This result is what Nora Bateson calls "aphanipoiesis," or "how life coalesces toward vitality in unseen ways." It is here, in small forums that are at the same time part of wider day-to-day contexts, that they become interwoven with how nature works. It is time that we support and care for the myriad needs that are systemically crying out for adjustment by understanding how we can help each other and celebrate our interdependency.

References

* "Warm data: Resolving injurious adaptations and encouraging awareness of our interdependencies." *Unpsychology* magazine, #8, 2022, pp.62-70. <https://www.unpsychology.org/>