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RELATIONSHIP RESTORATION AND COMMUNITY-BASED INCOME: TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES

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Abstract
Two defining features of our age are a psychosocial crisis and an ecological crisis. Addressing the former may be the key to addressing the latter. One concept that appears to contribute to our psychosocial crisis is psychological woundedness. This paper highlights intergenerational emotional neglect as a major source of woundedness and contends that healing from emotional neglect is almost impossible to achieve without help from others. Relationship restoration is identified as a key aspect of improving the human condition towards a partnership society and away from domination, a crucial challenge to addressing our ecological and psychosocial crises. Community-based income (CBI) aims to build the skills to heal emotional neglect and create relational and restorative communities based on a social investment approach, particularly long-term investment in people. CBI is a model in which participants are paid an income for any activity the community deems eligible, such as caring for people of all ages, study, work experience, and/or helping with community projects. CBI aims to build restorative and compassionate communities, based initially on addressing woundedness.

Keywords: relational ontology, woundedness, intergenerational emotional neglect, restorative practices, community-based income

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Introduction

A psychosocial crisis can be said to be a major contributor to the ecological crisis that is currently threatening human survival and thriving. Psychosocial crisis is defined in this paper as a crisis caused by the current average level of human cognition being insufficient to address our ecological crisis and insufficient to form

institutions capable of providing environments to increase cognitive capacities (Dickinson, 2009). This psychosocial crisis plays out at both a micro level of individual behaviour, health, and wellbeing, and, at the macro level of the effectiveness of our institutions, the ability to collaborate within countries, as well as at the national and international levels to solve existential problems.

There is now substantial literature confirming our ecological crisis (Bednarek, 2019; Wamsler et al., 2023). Paola and Jamieson (2018) state that in many respects climate change is the most dangerous experiment that humans have ever conducted. A corollary is, as Heikkurinen (2019) states, “[o]wing to the rigid path dependencies in the current techno-capitalist system, peak oil, and the political disinterest in curbing economic growth and overconsumption, a foreseen future is the collapse of the human civilization” (p. 538). Habermas (in Mitchell, 2019) contends that we basically have two alternatives: either we actively work towards peace based on a vision of unity, or we descend into chaos, dominated by aggression and violent tribalism.

What has not yet gained much traction is discussion of our psychosocial crisis, reflected particularly in the extent to which human potential has been reduced—for example as indicated by increasing rates of global emotional stress and psychological ill-health (Piao et al., 2024). This has resulted in decreased capacity for working towards peace based on a vision of unity in terms of the collective action we need to ensure sustainable societies. A common characteristic of all living organisms is to do everything possible to ensure their own survival (Gerhardt, 2017). The fact that we are unable to respond sufficiently to the need for urgent action on climate change and other ecological crises points to a psychosocial crisis affecting everything from the micro (such as individual values and worldviews) to the macro level (our collective governance systems). The psychosocial and ecological crises overlap in a way that highlights a core challenge for humanity: constructing a new narrative of ‘the good life’ based on, for example, voluntary simplicity (Alexander, 2013, p. 287), eschewing the allure of economic growth as being able to solve all humanity’s problems.

Promoting a new narrative is hampered by our current era of high risk and low trust (Blackmore, 2002), to which woundedness could be added as a defining feature of our time. The latter, according to Ivey and Partington (2014), is defined as the psychological impact of adverse childhood experiences and the resulting internal and interpersonal conflict. In this scenario, the maintenance of social order becomes increasingly problematic. As Ross (2011) states, social order requires peace, safety, and conforming to the law. Since social order must be preserved for human survival, it is then a matter of the way it is maintained. The internalisation of prosocial norms is ever more important as an effective and efficient means of maintaining social order. As Galtung (1994) notes, a key problem for society is how to build a structure that ensures that these norms and the associated solidarity are automatic.

Inequality, including that which results from racism, sexism, and other prejudices, is a major aspect of the psychosocial crisis. For example, Sapolsky (2004) notes that increases in crime and reductions in social capital are a result of increasing income inequality. Reduced social capital, such as reduced trust, is arguably inevitable, since social capital is based on reciprocity and equality of relationships, as compared to inequality being based on hierarchy and power over (Wilkinson, 2005). Ultimately the failure of elites to take the needs of others into account results in inequality and reduces connections, cooperativeness, collective capacity, and cultural adaptiveness (Hilton, 2015).

Individuals alone cannot solve inequality and other problems related to the increasing complexity of our economic and social systems. Rather, solutions require networked teams of people based on functional social relationships (Owen & Buck, 2020). Hence, the main argument underpinning this paper is that all human endeavours, from the micro to the macro, depend on the quality of human relationships (Burkitt, 2016). Among such endeavours, governance, in terms of decision making on the rules and regulations that shape our lives, is a key area that relies on high quality human relationships and is crucial for sustainability (Fabio & Peiró, 2018).

As Van Lange et al. (2013) imply, social dilemmas are significantly implicated in our psychosocial and ecological crises, and they pose a threat to social relationships. Social dilemmas have been made vastly more difficult by 10,000 years of human history involving a gradual "disruption and disintegration" of social relationships (Abrutyn, 2019, p. 113), an increase of the privileging of self-interest over the interests of others, and a decrease in self-regulation capacities (Deneen, 2018). A reduction in individual capacity results in a decrease in institutional capacity, which has contributed to power over, whereby hierarchical and exploitive relationships have become increasingly prevalent and consequential (Schmookler, 1995).

A concept with potential for addressing relationship disintegration is restorative practices, which are based on restoring and building relationships (Wachtel, 2005). Restorative practices recognise that relationships are central to individual wellbeing, communities, and society. Restorative practices can be used as a shared approach to problem solving based on respect, accountability, and support (Nurturing Evolutionary Development, 2024). They aim to strengthen relationships, increase effective communication skills, and repair harm and inappropriate behaviour in settings including schools, workplaces, and the local community (Anderson & Ross, 2018). Restorative practices are necessary before a more difficult process such as shared decision making can be attempted. One area restorative practices can assist with is "fostering pluralism without polarisation," a key aspect of sustainable governance (Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2022, p. 1431).

Aiming to promote restorative relationships is a small community group in North West Tasmania, Australia, who have developed a concept of community-based income, which builds on the existing concept of participation income (Hilamo & Komp, 2018). According to Perez-Munoz (2016) participation income is income paid in return for an activity deemed to be useful to society, and can be seen as a type of civic program aimed to address unmet social needs.

Community-based income (CBI) builds on the concept of participation income with an underlying aim of building the skills to heal emotional neglect and create relational and restorative communities based on a social investment approach,

particularly long-term investment in people. CBI is a model in which participants are paid an income for any activity the community deems eligible, such as caring for people of all ages, study, work experience, and/or helping with community projects. CBI aims to build restorative and compassionate communities, based initially on addressing woundedness.

Relational Ontology, Attachment Theory, and Cultural Transformation Theory

Many authors have contended that a significant contributor to our current psychosocial and ecological crises is the problem of how we relate to each other (Stieha, 2010). For Datta (2015), relational ontology (relational ways of being) highlights the vital role of relationality in all human systems and that all people have a responsibility towards others. Social relationships can be identified as the foundation of identity and existence (Wiggins et al., 2012). Attachment theory identifies that the quality of relationships in early life is crucial for our health and wellbeing over the life course (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Likewise, cultural transformation theory (Eisler, 2013) points to how our values and worldviews are substantially shaped by the quality of early caregiving. Eisler’s (2013) broader theory of human possibilities highlights the profound effects of experiences in early childhood on our worldview, including whether we think the world is a safe place or not.

There is a wide range of work arising from attachment theory that supports the idea that dominance has a disabling effect on the spectrum of development, from individuals to institutions, and that partnership has an enabling effect. At the level of the individual, for example, for Feeney and Collins (2015), close and caring relationships are undeniably linked to health and well-being at all stages in the life span.

An important underlying theory that aligns with relational ontology is Eisler’s (2013) theory of bio-culturalism, which contends that while we have a range of genetic capacities, from antisocial (psychopathology, cruelty, and so on) to prosocial (such as empathy, generosity, and altruism), the environment, including the prevailing

culture, has a large influence on which of these tendencies dominates. Of particular importance are the kinds of social relationships a particular culture or subculture promotes. Eisler (2013) identifies a partnership-domination continuum along which each culture might fall, which structures that culture's prevailing beliefs, institutions, and relationships. Eisler (2013) contends that cultures based on domination can not only harm physical and mental health, they also tend to promote a lack of maturity and a focus on survival needs rather than personal growth. Likewise, Deneen (2018) notes that liberalism (and one could add the long history of political domination before liberalism) has devastated human relationships. Some 500 years ago, the political philosophy of liberalism emerged partly as a reaction to the corruption of power, but is now deemed by Deneen (2018) to be a profoundly unsustainable belief system. He notes that liberalism, in privileging individual autonomy over collectivism, promotes the greatest source of threat to our current social order, particularly due to the reduction of social bonds in nearly every aspect of life.

Elliott and Lemert (2006) note the supremacy of individualism in Western cultures due to its "lures and seductions" (p. 3). Likewise, Deneen (2018) contends that it "ingratiates by invitation to the easy liberties, diversions and attractions of freedom, pleasure and wealth," and that this has profoundly changed all aspects of the human condition. Liberalism, with its foundation of individualism, is opposed to a relational ontology as an overarching theory, which is related to other important theories and practices as mentioned, such as cultural transformation theory, bio-culturalism, and restorative practices. The contribution of the concepts of woundedness, cultural adolescence, and reductions in the evolved development niche to the emergence of individualism and liberalism will now be discussed.

Woundedness and the Reduction of the Evolved Developmental Niche

Galtung (1994) points out three sources of mental health disorders that have arisen during modernity:

- an increasingly "large, vertical alpha structure" (for example, increases in authoritarian governments);

- a reduction in small, horizontal beta structures (that is, communities);
- the pervasiveness of an individualist, competitive culture (Galtung 1994, p. 127).

At an even deeper level, Zandler (2016) contends that despite the increasing evidence of the huge damage we humans are doing to the planet and to each other, we need compassion for ourselves. This is because we are unconsciously enacting survival patterns (such as short-term thinking and narcissism) often created by intergenerational emotional neglect (as will be discussed), which then have impacts at a larger scale (Scott, 2023). Also called for is a "compassion of recognition," based on the recognition that "we are all in the same boat," including that nearly everyone has the capacity to become addicted to a behaviour or substance that reduces individual health and has impacts for society (Fogleman, 2024, p. 58). Zandler (2016) further notes that safety patterns formed in the past are generally not helpful in the present. This aligns with Cozolino and Santos's (2014) notion that our very complex, evolved brains are "extremely vulnerable to dysregulation, dissociation, and emotional distress" (p. 157).

This paper concurs with McIntosh (2020) in that "[t]he only way to overcome cultural and political hyperpolarization is to grow out of it by becoming a more mature society. Polarization is pressing us to evolve or face further regression" (p. 1). Furthermore, he stated that transcendence, or developing beyond self-interest, is needed by all, and we must gain purpose and meaning by contributing to something greater than ourselves. An important task, as Flyer (2023) notes, is to unite a fragmented, conflicted, suffering humanity in which divide and rule has been a common feature of most societies. Polarisation, including negative bias against race, religion, politics, class, gender, etc., has become an endemic part of the human condition (McCoy et al., 2018).

The woundedness underlying the psychosocial crisis is pointed to by Kegan and Lahey (2016), who contend that:

> most people are spending time and energy covering up their weaknesses, managing other people's impressions of them, showing themselves to their best advantage, playing politics, hiding their inadequacies, hiding their

> uncertainties, hiding their limitations. . . . We regard this as the single biggest loss of resources that organisations suffer every day. . . . Is anything more valuable to a company than the way its people spend their energies? The total cost of this waste is simple to state and staggering to contemplate: it prevents organisations, and the people who work in them, from reaching their full potential. (Kegan & Lahey, p. 1)

Kegan and Lahey (2016) further state how organisations and their people can become dramatically greater resources to support each other's flourishing. They highlight human tendencies to focus on self-protection, but at the same time note that we also have the capacity for psychological growth. In fact, they state that the biggest single cause of burnout and psychological distress is a failure to experience personal growth. They point out that "[i]n an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world, the so-called VUCA world—a world of new challenges and opportunities—organisations naturally need to expect more, and not less, of themselves and the people who work for them" (p. 2).

Jordan (1995) intimates that our strong focus on individualism, self-sufficiency, and autonomy is related to our woundedness, whereby the preoccupation with material goods has detracted from our "natural search for safe and growth-enhancing connection" (p. 2). Further, Western society tends to socialise its members in a way that results in pervasive isolation, such as via defensive disconnection as a means to becoming successful. These authors all point to the need for us to do the inner work to contribute to a sustainable world, particularly to overcome intergenerational emotional neglect.

Intergenerational Emotional Neglect

This paper contends that a significant source of woundedness is intergenerational emotional neglect. Ludwig and Rostain (2009) state that emotional neglect refers to a pattern of relationship when children's needs for affection is often disregarded, ignored, invalidated, or unappreciated by caregivers. They note that caregivers may have difficulty understanding their children's need for love, affection, closeness,

and support, and/or they may feel overwhelmed or powerless to meet those emotional needs on a regular basis. The results include, as Bowker (2022) notes, helplessness being learnt early in life. “[T]he child’s self is unable to obtain what it needs and finds its fantasy of primary narcissistic omnipotence disrupted by an unwelcome, even horrifying, sense of absence, abandonment, and desolation” (Bowker, p. 364). These patterns then become cumulative and intergenerational, passing from generation to generation (Verhage & Schuengel, 2015).

As Narvaez et al. (2019) note, mothers, and other primary caregivers aim to provide an environment that promotes the development of children’s rapidly growing brains. They use the term evolved developmental niche (EDN) for this environment and note the features that are important, such as “responsiveness to young children’s needs, extensive positive touch, lengthy on-request breastfeeding, self-directed social play in nature, multiple responsive adult caregivers, and a positive climate of support” (Narvaez et al., p. 1). These features were present in hunter-gatherer societies, which comprise 95% of our history (Narvaez et al., 2019).

However, Maté (2022) points to the underlying problem of our cultural systems not supporting attuned, present, responsive, connected parenting. Woundedness often begins with stress transmitted in the womb, and after birth is exacerbated by a range of pressures on caregivers and parents (including economic stresses, institutional racism, and sexism) and the reduction of extended family supports and community ties. Harsh parenting is often a result, commonly leading to shame and subsequent submissive shame management strategies, such as low self-esteem, self-attack, and withdrawal from social interaction. However much we try and be good parents, says Maté (2022), the influence of our own experience of emotional neglect is likely to have an impact on our own children.

Neglectful parents usually come from families in which, as children, they were ignored or neglected by their parents. This can then lead to a vicious cycle whereby emotional neglect contributes to heightened sensitivity to relational pain and a subsequent avoidance of relationships, but to compensate for the lack of feelings of safety provided by social support, many turn to consumerism to attempt fill the void

(see The Manic Society in Peltz, 2005, see also Rucker and Galinsky, 2008). The working class and middle class can be said to be unwittingly complicit in the system that the upper class controls to drive inequality; our woundedness contributes to being seduced by a materialist culture (Peltz, 2005).

The concept of intergenerational emotional neglect and the woundedness that results fits with Jockelson’s (2018) concept of a culture of permanent adolescence. This is reflected in a “massively exaggerated acting out of adolescent impulses, values and behaviour” (p. 1). He identifies “unsatisfactory childhoods” in which “the early problems or even failure of healthy attachment between child and parent cause a child to be anxious and rejecting”, whereby isolated nuclear families are often unhealthy, and involve the playing out in adulthood of adolescent behaviours, including a lack of self-regulation (Jockelson, p. 1). A pernicious effect of emotional neglect is the unconscious bias of othering, which as Canales (2000) notes is frequently based on relationships of domination and subordination. All these psychodynamics indicate the need for restorative communities, as will now be discussed.

Everyone Needs a Crew: Toward Restorative Communities

Amster (2003) defines restorative communities as based on practices by which “participants continually remain open to each other’s concerns, ideas, needs, feelings, desires, pain and suffering so that each can see the other [as] a person engaged in an unending struggle to become human, with dignity” (p. 11). Restorative communities are based on the science of restorative practices, defined as “the science of restoring and developing social capital, social discipline, emotional well-being and civic participation through participatory learning and decision making” (Wachtel, 2005, p. 86).

The principle of restorative practices resonates with Kegan and Lahey’s (2016) contention that “everyone needs a crew” (p. 86). They state that if people must be able to express vulnerability in order to change, they need social support, such as via a community, to help fulfill their needs for safety and validation of their worth,

but also to help identify unconscious behaviours. Demaris and Landsman (2022) identify three conditions in building a relational culture:

- the necessity for a “caring surround,” based on fulfilling needs for belonging and social support;
- appropriate levels of challenge for community members to motivate them to overcome difficulties together with others;
- opportunities to contribute in ways experienced as meaningful to the community (Demaris & Landsman, p. 6).

The bottom line is that deliberative planning (Laurian, 2009) and persistent implementation are needed to progress this deep and challenging work towards a sustainable society. The potential of community-based income to contribute to this work will now be discussed, beginning with a brief discussion of its main predecessor, universal basic income.

Universal Basic Income

The economic system needs transformation to promote restorative and sustainable societies, including re-assessing how we view work and contribution. The debate regarding universal basic income begins at a very basic level to promote conversations on these topics. The simplest definition of universal basic income (UBI) is that it is an unconditional guaranteed cash benefit that the government pays to all its citizens (Kearney & Mogstad, 2019). It is paid without a means test or requirement to work (Parijs, 2000). As Kearney and Mogstad (2019) note, there are three main arguments for the implementation of a UBI: to address financial precarity; to address rising unemployment, such as that due to automation; and to simplify welfare systems. However, Kearney and Mogstad (2019) doubt that UBI would be an effective model overall, due to its lack of capacity to drive systemic and transformational change.

As Haagh (2019) notes, a common argument for universal basic income more generally is its potential to create a more egalitarian society; however, it actually requires initial conditions of social equality to be successfully introduced. In other

words, the effect that universal basic income has on the broader society depends very much on the prevailing worldview of the society at the time of implementation. In an individualist, competitive society based on dominance dynamics, an unconditional basic income is likely to perpetuate these dynamics. A universal basic income is very much in line with “freedom for all” (Henderson, 2017, p. 1) while paying only cursory attention to the difference between freedom from external constraints (often called negative freedom) and the freedom to achieve one’s own goals (often called positive freedom). An in-depth discussion of this argument is beyond the scope of this paper, but the main point is that UBI doesn’t explicitly address our current levels of high risk, low trust, and woundedness.

In particular, the unconditionality of UBI perpetuates avoidance coping (involving avoiding stressors rather than dealing with them) (Scott, 2023); it ignores the need for social support for people to begin to address the consequences of intergenerational emotional neglect and the resulting woundedness. Instead, a model conditional on taking steps, however small, towards greater capacity to interact with others and towards some level of collective action will now be discussed.

Community-Based income and the Live Well Tasmania Campaign

Community-based income (CBI) is a model in which participants are paid an income for any activity that the community has decided is eligible, such as caring for other people of all ages, study, work experience, and/or helping with community projects (Krabbe, 2023). While this model has never been implemented before, it is envisaged a community alliance would manage the CBI, using a restorative approach to rebuilding social relationships instead of the current welfare approach which is a profit driven and often punitive model (Rossel et al., 2023). There are four main benefits of a CBI:

- addressing unemployment rates, which are predicted to rise due to automation;
- addressing poverty and increasing costs of living;
- replacing dysfunctional welfare systems;

- mobilising resources for the large range of social and ecological work that could be done to benefit the community, but which is not currently funded by either national governments or the market.

Tasmania, an island state of Australia has a community group, Live Well Tasmania (LWT) (https://www.lwt.org.au), the mission of which is to increase health and wellbeing, community capacity, and resilience, and to build sustainable communities. LWT has a community centre and a 63-hectare community farm in North West Tasmania. We recently commenced focussing on the restoration of relationships, based on a belief that all the facets of our mission rely on the strength of interpersonal relationships, and on mental health. An example of our projects is a trial of care farming (also called therapeutic farming) as a means of addressing mental health. We started a campaign for a community-based income in 2023. There has been very positive support to date for the campaign; however, a lot of work still needs to be done to gain federal funding for the trial.

While CBI has never been trialled, there have been many other (and varied) trials of universal basic income and other forms of income support that may shed light on the capacity of the concept to progress towards what the International Institute for Restorative Practices calls "restoring and developing social capital, social discipline, emotional well-being and civic participation through participatory learning and decision making" (as quoted in Wachtel, 2005, p. 86). Standing (n.d.) cites evidence of success of universal basic income in increasing health and well-being as a good beginning. For Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT), a model with many similarities to CBI, Rowlings and Rubio (Rawlings & Rubio, 2005) found that in Colombia, Mexico, and Nicaragua, CCT projects were correlated with increased human capital, increased school enrolment rates, improved preventive health care, and increased household consumption, which are important for those living in poverty. In the meantime, work continues on how the CBI model would function in practice, based on restorative practices. Training will be a very important component for the CBI "Community Connectors" who will assist participants in identifying what they wish to do to qualify for the income; the latter may include addressing barriers to seeking social support and social interaction. The training would include the consequences of intergenerational emotional neglect, building on the current literature on trauma

(Jackson, 2020). Our current welfare systems tend to perpetuate the emotional neglect commonly impacting welfare recipients: emotional connection tends to be sacrificed in favour of a business- orientated approach of minimising costs and maximising profits (Stanford & Taylor, 2013).

Conclusion

This paper makes the case that dominance dynamics over the last 10,000 years of human history have led us to a point of profound psychosocial and ecological unsustainability, threatening human survival and thriving. One result is that intergenerational emotional neglect has become culturally perpetuated and ingrained, whereby arguably all members of Western cultures at least are affected to a greater or lesser extent.

Concepts such as relational culture and restorative practice show promise of being able to restore partnership dynamics and of addressing intergenerational emotional neglect. Community-based income has potential for addressing the three elements needed to promote relational culture: fulfilling individual needs for belonging and social support; providing appropriate levels of challenge for community members to motivate them to overcome difficulties together with others; and providing opportunities to contribute in ways experienced as meaningful to the community. It is hoped that the ripple effects of the resulting increases in mental health can create a scaffold for an increase in capacities for the collective action needed to address our psychosocial and ecological crises.

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