

The Family Unconscious

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Abstract

This essay explores the concept of the family unconscious, with reference to Rupert Sheldrake's theory of morphic fields. The main focus of the essay is what could be described as "the family unconscious-in-action," which includes the family unconscious and the influence of ancestors, pathology and health, dreams and "psi events," along with anecdotal stories from my personal life and client-work. The final part of the paper explores the myth of Oedipus and the family curse, within the context of the family unconscious. Throughout the paper, reference is made to the family unconscious and the counselling process.

Readers please note: the form of this paper more closely resembles the style of a Samoan tale called a *su'ifeifiloi* than it does an academic paper. A *su'ifeifiloi* has a central theme which is expressed as a medley of ideas that, initially, appear to be disconnected. It is through the telling of the story that the ideas become woven together in a meaningful way.

It seemed to me that, in addition to a personal or individual unconscious, there was another active, dynamic level of consciousness that deeply influences our thoughts, emotions, and psychic energy. This affective energy level thrives on the powerful network of family patterns and emerges as the Family Unconscious.

(Bynum, 1984, p. 6)

Some mental health professionals consider Edward Bruce Bynum to be the premier practitioner and researcher to focus on "the family unconscious" in the field of psychology. Bynum—a psychologist, family therapist, and the director of the Behavioural Medicine and Biofeedback Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Health Services—is a clinician of many years' standing and a spiritual seeker. Both interests inform his

theories on the power of the family unconscious, and the importance of its exploration in the counselling room. As Bynum's works are not widely known in this country, this essay explores his and my own understandings on this important topic.

What is the family unconscious?

I first came across Bynum's work when doing research for my chapter in the recently published book *Penina Uliuli: Contemporary Challenges in Mental Health for Pacific Peoples* (Culbertson, Agee, & Makasiale, 2007). I found that his ideas on the family unconscious shed light on my experiences of my own family and became a valuable resource in my clinical practice. His theory of the family unconscious was helpful in strengthening my ability to hold my clients, not only as individuals but also as members of a particular family group.

In a very real sense each family member is deeply interwoven into our intimate psychological functioning. Each is enfolded and reflected in the other. The fragments of past dreamers are the living tissue of our present lives and all are unfolding toward some new extended identity in the future. This system of shared meaning, shared feeling and shared emotion is generally termed the family unconscious level of the psyche. It is a dimension of our psychological functioning that lies in a space "between" the individual or individuated unconscious illuminated by Freud, and the shared collective unconscious illuminated by Jung. Both Freud and Jung characterise the unconscious as a determined system. However, the family unconscious lies somewhere between their theories of the unconscious and is able to be modified by those who participate in its common or shared field.

(Bynum, 2003, p. 23)

This "common or shared field" is an intimate web connecting our parents and children, spouses and lovers, friends, and the wider community. The family unconscious is a field with energies that transmit images, feelings, and thoughts among family members and beyond.¹

The family unconscious is not a modern discovery. It is "old knowledge" carried by indigenous cultures for many thousands of years. Bynum makes reference to the Australian Aborigines and the African peoples, and their understandings of the family unconscious:

For the Australian Aborigines, the Dreaming, or dreamtime, is conceived of as the eternally present life-principle that must be personally sustained and reinvigorated

by human beings by way of sacred ritual and belief. The purpose of ritual and ceremony itself is to make a place in the waking world where dreamtime is dynamically active in their lives. This includes the dynamically experienced presence of ancestors and other family members. Here, their family unconscious stretches out to enfold not only the living, but also the mythic and powerful deceased....

In Africa, the importance of dreams—and family dreams in particular—also has a long cultural, clinical, and psychospiritual history. It is a given in many religious societies that family members, both living and deceased, and also the gods themselves, can and do communicate with the dreamer in the dream. This belief greatly expands the personal matrix of experience and causality since this extended family unconscious system enfolds not only the “to be born” and the living, but up to five generations of the departed. The recently departed ancestors are referred to as “living-dead” because they are thought to be in a state of personal immortality and it is through them that the spirit world is believed to become personal. After five generations in this Sasa period, they are said to disappear into the great Zamani. “The living-dead” are thought to be deeply concerned with family affairs.

(Bynum, 2003, p. 30)

In traditional Samoan culture, the concept of dream-dialogue is called *moe manatunatu*. It is believed that through *moe manatunatu*, the ancestors and family gods communicate with the dreamer (usually a chief) to give spiritual support for important decision-making processes (Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi, 2006, p. 4).

Bynum emphasises that we are born into the field of an already existing family unconscious, then through our own unfolding we make subtle changes to the field. After our death, the field continues to exist. Jungian analyst James Hillman (1989) comments on the themes of the continuation of the family and the interconnectedness of family members:

We are born into a family and, at last, we rejoin its full extension when gathered to the ancestors. Family grave, family altar, family trust, family secrets, and family pride. Our names are family names, our physiognomies (physical characteristics) bear family traits and our dreams never let us depart from home—father and mother, brother and sister—from those faces and those rooms. Even alone and only ourselves, we are also part of them, partly them....

(p. 196)

The interweaving patterns of intelligence, energy, and motivation within the field of

the family unconscious are not only located within the individual; they are also located between individuals and hence are non-local in nature. Within this field, the psyche is understood to be an open system rather than a closed, intrapsychic system, and is constantly interacting with other psyches in the field, mostly below the threshold of waking consciousness. Each family member is reflected and enfolded into the intimate psychological functioning of other family members. The imprints from previous generations are alive and active in the current generation. The field is both vast and intimate. Bynum emphasises that the field of the family unconscious originates prior to and deeper than the individualised mental-egoic experience. He also raises the very important subject of individuation, the on-going personal struggles we all face in differentiating ourselves from our families and the collective. From my own understanding, the individuated person is not detached from the group and is able to accommodate dependent/independent needs of self and others from the mature level of interdependence.

Biologist Rupert Sheldrake's ground-breaking work on *morphic fields* and *morphic resonance* in the plant and animal worlds has brought to public awareness the concept of vast fields of stored information potentials that guide the evolution of biological systems. *Morphic resonance* refers to the process of transmission of information from the past across a whole species. This information is carried in a dynamic and evolving morphic field of energy.

Perhaps a real-life example will help clarify the concepts of morphic field and resonance. Sheldrake (1995) tells the story of a group of rats in a laboratory at Harvard University. These rats were taught a new trick. Not too long after the first group learned the trick, researchers in other laboratories located in Scotland and Australia were astonished to discover "their" rats learned the new trick even faster than the first group. Using Sheldrake's theory, we could say that the new information learned by the Harvard rats was transmitted by morphic resonance (like radio signals beaming out into the atmosphere) across the morphic field of the whole species of rats. Hence, by the time the later groups were shown the trick for the first time, they had already received the new information via their morphic field (<http://www.sheldrake.org/homepage.html>).

From this perspective, the family unconscious also functions as a morphic field for the transmission of information from the past. Sometimes there are moments of instantaneous communication between family members when there is a life-threatening situation. However, the family unconscious is not species-wide across the whole of humanity; this is the *collective* unconscious. The *family* unconscious is

specific to family groups, or can sometimes be experienced in groups that function in a family-like manner. Whether our parents, grandparents, and other relatives are alive or deceased, and whether there was a relationship built and experienced or not, we carry their stories which are imprinted into the woven fabric of our family lineage. Our ancestors are the human ground that we stand upon. Our psychological growth and development has been, and continues to be, unconsciously shaped by our forebears' experiences of love, loss, triumph, and tragedy. Their patterns of relating, not only *how* they thought but *what* they thought, their life experiences, and perhaps more importantly, how they responded to those experiences and much more: we carry these stories from the past, whether or not they form part of our consciousness.

In a recent interview, Chilean film-maker Alejandro Jodorowsky (1999) speaks with deep feeling about his perception of his own family unconscious:

I realized that we had a family unconscious ... I am thinking family. My illnesses were created by my family. My behaviour, the way I live, my conception of money, my emotional and sexual relationships are all created by my family. Indeed the psychological and genetic field that I come from marks my whole life ... If I want to understand myself; I have to understand my family tree, because I am permanently possessed as in voodoo. Even when we cut ties with our family, we carry it. In our unconscious the persons are always alive. The dead live with us.

(<http://www.jaybabcock.com/jodomean.html>)

Dismantling of the extended family system

Until very recently in human history, the normal living arrangement was an extended family group. This is still the situation for a large percentage of the world's population. It was in the United States, however, that the associated concepts of suburbia and nuclear family first emerged, and the rest of the Western world then rapidly followed suit. In his book *The Biology of Transcendence*, Joseph Chilton Pearce (2002) observes:

In the 1890's roughly 94% of Americans lived on farms where the extended family was the rule because it was economically expedient. One hundred years later, 96% of all Americans live in cities and towns, which is most expedient for corporate, political, or state-religious concerns, but is unviable and disruptive to the nuclear family.... Michel Odent points out that the nuclear family by itself is an unnatural and nonviable relationship, but when the nuclear family is at the nucleus of the extended family, and the extended family of society, the system

works beautifully. If you strip away the extended family however, as we have largely done, the nucleus implodes.

(p. 253)

The breakdown of the extended family system has occurred throughout the West in a relatively short timeframe. Previously, individual consciousness emerged from the nest of the family unconscious where it was embedded. The extended family system where three generations lived, loved and fought together provided a strong and unified holding matrix for each family member. Jungian analyst Donald Kalsched (1996) clarifies this sense of “holding”:

To have a childhood requires a holding environment in which the child can fall back on caretaking parents. The child does not have to “hold itself together,” there is someone else present to do this. D. W. Winnicott has shown that when this “good-enough” facilitating environment is provided, growth of the child’s personality can occur.

(p. 48)

The obvious disadvantage of living in an extended family system, from a Western perspective, is the lack of freedom from fairly rigid family roles. However, the pressure on parents today in a nuclear family system, without extended family support, is enormous. As well as providing a cushion of practical and emotional support, in Bynum’s (1984) view, the extended family also provides a significant benefit to psychological health. A healthy connection to one’s family unconscious provides a buffer from the field of the collective unconscious. The invasion of such contents into an individual psyche seriously disturbs psychological functioning, as in a psychotic episode.

When we lose the intimate connection to the field of energy of the family unconscious and fall prey to the illusion of absolute autonomy or individuality, we run the risk of real illness and a sense of being grounded. Dynamic interconnection and interdependence is vital to our well-being.

(Bynum, 1984, p. 22)

Health and pathology

In the family unconscious field, there is a shared body of imagery, affect, ideation, and feeling that influences the functioning of family members. If this shared body has developed in a significantly unbalanced way, a symptomatic disturbance will arise in

family members. The symptomatic disturbance, according to Bynum (1994), is really a contraction of life-force around a shared dysfunctional family unconscious image.

The family's influence on health and illness is immense. Whether it be a physical illness or disease process, an emotional or behavioural problem, or that elusive somatizing or psychosomatic disorder, the reactivity of the family matrix is crucial to its outcome on many levels.

(p. 283)

One of my clients exhibited a significant pattern of paranoid ideation that ran through his family system over several generations. The shared unconscious image that *the world is a very dangerous place*, together with a powerful affective charge, emerged in different family members in a diverse array of symptoms, such as agoraphobia, depression, and the high use of alcohol to manage anxiety. Another example includes the recurrence in an individual of a symptom or event that also occurred in a parent at a similar age. I recall one of my clients who suffered a psychological breakdown at age 38. This turned out to be the same age at which her mother went through a similar experience.

A friend of mine recounted a comparable event in his larger family system. When his father was five years old, his grandfather moved the family (including the only child) to a rural farm and “disappeared” into the long hours of agricultural labour. When my friend, the eldest child, was five years old, his father got a major job promotion, and began to be gone frequently from the rest of the family. When my friend got divorced, he realised that his eldest child was five years old. In the unconscious of that intergenerational system, the age of five seems to be a dangerous one for eldest, or only, children.

Research into the field of family systems and psychosomatic illnesses has uncovered a plethora of conditions spread across several generations of family groups including asthma, diabetes, chronic muscular pain, migraine headaches, gastrointestinal disorders, ulcers, even cancer and leukaemia.

(Bynum, 1994, p. 284)

In the field of family systems theory this phenomenon is known as the multigenerational transmission of symptomology (Bynum, 2003, p. 285). Alberto Villoldo, a psychologist and medical anthropologist, underwent shamanic initiations with Inca and Amazonian shamans. He writes about the transmission of psychological wounds across the generations:

We can also suffer from ancestral wounds that have been passed down from one generation to the next—perhaps endured during the Holocaust, the Great Depression, or a revolution. No matter what the cause, we inherit a set of beliefs from our wounded ancestors that we take for our own. Negative attitudes about abundance, scarcity, success, failure, security, sexuality and intimacy can all come from this ancestral wounding. When this kind of generational soul loss is handed down, children are plagued by issues they didn't even experience in their own lifetimes, yet they end up suffering from despair and self-judgement as a result.

(Villoldo, 2005, p. 49)

I have found in my counselling work that the notion of ancestral wounds/trauma has given my clients a sense of relief and comfort. It helped them to know that not all their difficulties were personal. For those clients who were mothers with dependent children, it has been moving for them to realise that, through the counselling process, they had the opportunity to transcend the limiting beliefs and behaviours they had inherited, thus releasing their children as well as themselves. Considering the influence of the family unconscious, I have found it invaluable in the counselling process to undertake a genogram with each new client. Genograms are most important tools for uncovering these repetitive, unconscious, intergenerational patterns in families, and many counsellor education programmes in New Zealand now incorporate routine training in constructing and reading genograms. In the US, virtually every credentialing organisation for mental health professionals requires that case studies for qualification include a genogram of the client under discussion. (For more information on genograms, see McGoldrick, Gerson, & Shellenberger, 1999.)

Dreams and psi events

Dreams are an important form of communication between members within the family unconscious. When working therapeutically with families, Bynum requests that each family member keep a dream journal to bring to session each week. One of the benefits of this method is that there is plenty of unconscious material to work with. Secondly, as a family dream reflects the unique perspective of the dreamer within the life of the family, each family member has the opportunity to “feel with” the inner experiences of their significant others. In his book *Families and the Interpretation of Dreams*, Bynum (2003) provides clear guidelines for practitioners working with family dreams with an individual, couple or family group:

Working with dream imagery and dream symbolism in a family or larger group situation greatly expands one's own boundaries, yet maintains a sense of external cohesiveness and integrity. This often stimulates similar processes in others. One can begin to see how an issue in one's own life is stimulated and unfolds systematically in the lives of others with whom one is intimately involved. This occurs both on a psychological and somatic level.

(p. 192)

Bynum emphasises the normality of “psi events” (such as telepathy and precognition) among family members. He posits that this is simply another way in which information is transmitted through the field of the family unconscious. Also significant is Bynum’s finding that psi events are most likely to occur where high levels of compassion and altruistic concern for family members prevail in a family group.

There's much evidence to support the argument that the healthier the family is, the more likely they are able to communicate deeply (psi) not only in waking state but also in dream state, including communication about powerful subjects.

(Bynum, 2003, pp. 90–91)

I recall working with one of my clients who brought such a dream to session. In the dream she saw her brother’s car crash into a tree. She ran to the car and found him slumped over the wheel, unconscious and seriously injured. She knew he would die. In session, my client reported that in the dream she had felt dead inside. We looked at her dream from a symbolic perspective: what was the dream pointing to about her own psycho-dynamics? We also explored the historical and current relationship between her and her brother, and the family patterns of dealing with powerful emotion. After the session, I was puzzled by the dream. It was powerful and gripping, and yet I felt somehow that we’d missed the essence of it.

Roughly four weeks later my client rang up, deeply shaken, to tell me that she couldn’t come to session that day as she was on her way to hospital. Her brother (who was in his mid-twenties) was in intensive care due to multiple injuries he’d suffered in a car accident. Sadly, he died several days later. My client told me afterwards that the dream had helped her to cope with the tragedy of his death; it had prepared her for the shock of his sudden demise and she was able to support other family members who didn’t fare as well as she did. World-renowned physicist Stephen Hawking came to the conclusion, from his research on the nature of the space–time continuum, that the near future sends ripples (waves) into the present (Hawking, Thorne, Novokov,

Ferris, & Lightman, 2002). Seen from this perspective, we could say that waves from the near future about the fatal accident were transmitted through the field of their family unconscious (my client and her brother) and the information then communicated to my client in her dream. As Bynum (1984) says, “The dream is more primary process mode and closer to the heart-beat of the family” (p. 34).

Perhaps unwisely, I started writing this article two days before my late mother’s birthday. As counsellors, we are aware that anniversaries can activate the memories and emotional field connected to a significant other. Not surprisingly, I found it hard to focus on writing when feelings of loss and sadness continually rose up. However, instead of these feelings gradually dissipating, I felt increasingly raw inside and heavy in my body to the point of physical lethargy. With this listlessness, I also began to experience vague fears about the future which hadn’t been there before. During this time my computer crashed so I couldn’t write anyway. I decided simply to be with this experience. I had no idea where this raw heaviness and lethargy was coming from. It felt qualitatively different from the grief associated with my mother’s death. After several days in this emotional/somatic fog, I had a dream which helped me to understand what was going on.

The dream begins on a large sportsfield in the middle of the night. I’m walking across the field and find my male cousin sitting alone on the ground (in the dream he’s about four years old, however his actual age is mid-forties). He is confused and distressed. When I kneel down beside him I know that he’s infected with intestinal parasites. I carry him back to his family home where his mother and sisters are waiting.

To give a context to the dream, my cousin’s mother is the sister of my mother. His mother and my mother happen to share the same birthday. My cousin’s family had lost their father suddenly the previous year, so at the time of this recent birthday my aunt experienced the double loss of her sister and her husband. As explained by Bynum, the psyche relaxes and opens during sleep. At this time, communication occurs when psyches within the field of the family unconscious “touch” one another. A clue that some form of communication has taken place is either through a dream or a strong felt-sense of the other person upon waking. I understood from my dream that, at a deep level, my psyche had touched my cousin’s psyche. This occurred, I believe, due to the shared themes of the death of a parent and the shared birthdays of our mothers, which were often celebrated together with both families. My psychic field

was very likely resonating at a similar enough frequency to my cousin's psyche to allow morphic resonance to occur. In the field of our shared family unconscious, I became "infected" with the grief of my cousin's family.

The motif of intestinal parasites is an interesting one. In the body, they cause problems at the level of base chakra, which focuses on life/death events, the drive for survival, and kinship themes of the family group (for Bynum's model of the chakras as a developmental schema for the family group, see 1984, pp. 100–113). The death of a parent sends powerful waves through the family unconscious. Death and birth are archetypal events that register strongly across this matrix. The death of a parent, even in adult-age children, stirs up very early survival fears that are held in the body. The eggs and larvae of the most common types of intestinal parasites reside in the soil and are usually spread by children. In my dream I walk across a field and find my young cousin who is infected. The field/soil in my dream is a metaphor for the field of the family unconscious and the parasites from that field are those deep survival fears that "eat away on the inside," taking energy from the body-mind system. I had this dream just when the "infection" had run its course. This experience confirmed to me how deeply we are affected by family members and that this influence is beyond the usual constraints of time and space. Of course the reverse is true: that I am also affecting others within the field of my family unconscious.²

During a counselling session, one of my Pasifika clients reported that she could see (in an inward sense) a large group of her ancestors in the room. I couldn't see them, although I felt an energy shift in the room when they appeared. They stood in a half circle around her, which my client experienced as comforting. I welcomed her ancestors into the room, where they remained standing quietly in the same place. My client described in detail the clothing worn by each ancestor. Many of the outfits puzzled her as she'd never seen these styles before. The same group of ancestors, in the same clothing, appeared in sessions on many later occasions. Mostly they remained silent, but sometimes she asked them for advice on current matters. One of the ancestors appeared to be the spokesperson for the group and readily responded to her concerns. It then struck me that perhaps my client would benefit from doing a family tree. She liked the idea and set to work straight away. She found it a meaningful process and especially exciting when she recognised one of her ancestors from a very old book she found in the library. It turned out that some of her ancestors' clothes were worn by members of the royal family. Their story was long and complex, filled with betrayal and heartbreak.

Undertaking the construction of the family tree gave my client a new sense of dignity and belonging. Her identity as a Pasifika woman living in New Zealand's multicultural society was strengthened. The earlier despair from feeling overwhelmed by the impact of colonisation was lessened. Her deepest fear was that the cultural treasures from the past were rapidly disappearing. In one very emotional session she sobbed, "It's all gone!" We wept together. The undertaking of her family tree gave her another perspective, in which "it" (the cultural treasures) hadn't gone at all. She needed only to turn around and look for them. At the time I was a new counsellor and did not know about Bynum's works on the family unconscious. However, many years later, I now understand that our cultural treasures are accessible through the family unconscious—that each one of us carries cultural and other knowledge reaching back many generations. Such experiences serve as a reminder that there is so much we don't know. There are times in the counselling relationship when it can seem that we are called to witness a great Mystery.

The Oedipus myth and the family curse

Due to the writings of Freud, most of us are familiar with the concept of the oedipal triangle: a young boy's unconscious desire to kill his father and marry his mother. However, there are other ways of interpreting the classical Greek myth, in addition to the Freudian interpretation, which focus on the intrapsychic perspective.

We carry the mystery of our history which reaches back, beyond our current lives, directly to the family lineage. As well as our genetic blueprint, we inherit deeply entrenched emotional and cognitive styles, and natural talents such as in the field of poetry and mathematics. On the shadow side of the family legacy, there are those dark secrets (skeletons in the closet) and a whole raft of pathologies (using this word in its original meaning, "sufferings of the soul") that no family unconscious is completely free of. Perhaps one of the most disturbing patterns in a family unconscious is what is known as the family curse. Both the Oedipus and Elektra myths share the same mythic theme of the family curse. I have decided to focus on the Oedipus myth, as it is more well-known, to explore the family curse and its relevance to the family unconscious.

King Laius (father of Oedipus) is head of the House of Thebes. He offends both Apollo and Artemis, who are the divine protectors of children, by raping a youth who is the son of his friend. The Oracle informs King Laius of the divine deities whom he has offended. He is told that he will meet his death at the hands of his own son. At this point it is possible for Laius to stop the curse by

admitting his crime and humbly making an offering to the god and goddess to expiate his wrong-doing. Out of arrogance he refuses to accept the sentence. He secretly tries to avoid punishment by curtailing sexual relations with his wife, Queen Jocasta, without explaining the reason. She feels hurt and rejected, and manages to seduce Laius when he's drunk. She becomes pregnant and eventually gives birth to a baby boy. Laius again tries to cheat the Oracle by leaving the new-born baby on a hillside to die. He nails the baby's feet with a stake into the ground. The wrath of Apollo and Artemis is compounded by this cruel act, and now the entire city of Thebes is cursed by the presence of a giant Sphinx. The abandoned boy is rescued by a kind shepherd, who gives him the name Oedipus, meaning "swollen foot." He grows up believing that his parents are the King and Queen of Corinth. As a young man Oedipus also consults the Oracle and is told that he will one day kill his father and marry his mother. Oedipus, like his father, tries to cheat the Oracle. He flees Corinth and runs straight into his destiny. He meets his birth father on the road. The unknown older man has blocked his way and speaks to him in an abusive way. In a fit of rage, Oedipus kills Laius. He then confronts the Sphinx and through this heroic act frees the city of Thebes. Thus he wins the kingship and, unknowingly, the hand of his mother, the Queen. When Oedipus discovers the truth, he is so horrified that he blinds himself and eventually dies an outcast. His mother commits suicide. However, the curse continues on through his children and is not spent until every last member of the House of Thebes is dead.

The myth of Oedipus, in all its shocking brutality, provides an excellent example of a disturbed family unconscious. The story can be read on both symbolic and literal levels. On the symbolic level, the abuse of one's God-given gifts and talents (the creative inner children) out of greed, arrogance or ruthless ambition is essentially self-destructive. Such an attitude, compounded by wrong-action, flows through the family unconscious to future generations. The flow-on effect to descendants may cause major disruptions to their unfolding individuation process by the contraction of life-force into symptomology (as discussed earlier) or by diverting life-force through unconsciously "acting out" the family myth. On the literal level, we are aware, as counsellors, that cruelty towards children in the form of physical and/or sexual abuse has serious consequences for several generations. Although the myth contains a severe warning, it also hints that by taking a different approach from that of Laius and Oedipus, a better outcome is possible.

By being willing to struggle honestly and humbly when confronting the reality of one's family myth or curse, in all its ugliness, it is possible to make choices that are life-enhancing. These life-enhancing choices then flow back into the family unconscious and have a positive effect on other family members, including descendants. This is relevant to our work as counsellors, as there are many clients who come from family systems that have been unhealthy over many generations, and whose family members appear to be "cursed" in one way or another. Exploration of the mythic themes of a client's family patterns—the deeper stories that are enacted and often disguised by personal experience—can facilitate the healing process within the counselling relationship. Rather than deny our family roots, it is vital that we counsellors and clients understand, live with, and address them as creatively as possible.

Conclusion

Within the scope of this article, it has only been possible to touch lightly upon the concept of the family unconscious, its "field" nature, and the diverse associated activities within the personal sphere. For further reading, Bynum's books, which provided the backbone for this discussion, are listed in the bibliography. Bynum's website, The Obelisk Foundation (<http://www.obeliskfoundation.com/>), also provides information on the family unconscious, as well as his on-going research project on family dreams.

The final words rightly belong to Bynum (1984): "In its healthy form the family unconscious is the taproot of compassion" (p. 196).

Endnotes

- 1 Readers with a scientific "bent" will find Lynne McTaggart's book *The Field* very helpful. This book has been meticulously researched and provides up-to-date findings from quantum, or sub-atomic, physics on the nature of fields, including human transmission of information at the quantum level.
- 2 My own understanding of working with dreams has developed from having undertaken several years of Jungian dream-work as well as participating in numerous courses on dream logic and symbolism, myths and fairy tales.

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