

## Book Review

Kelly, Jr, V. C. and Thorsborne, M. (Eds) (2014). *The Psychology of Emotion in Restorative Practice - How Affect Script Psychology Explains How and Why Restorative Practice Works*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 272pp, ISBN 978-1-84905-974-9.

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Intuitively, restorative practice seems like it should work. It feels like a good idea. However, in this age of evidence-based practice and rigorous evaluation, funders and sceptics need reassurance that something definitely does 'work'. From my own perspective, I have long wished to see restorative practice principles become more fully embedded in the youth and criminal justice systems in Scotland. Such principles seem to have real value and relevance in the context of residential child care and work with vulnerable children and young people too. Take Atkinson Secure Children's Home in Exeter as an example. Puffett (2013) describes how this institution witnessed an 87% reduction in restraint incidents over five years and less frequent recourse to the use of single separation following staff members' embrace of restorative principles. It became the first Children's Home to be awarded a Restorative Service Quality Mark (RSQM) by the Restorative Justice Council (RJC). This edited collection by Vernon Kelly and Margaret Thorsborne is therefore extremely timely because in *The Psychology of Emotion in Restorative Practice*, they begin to articulate a theory as to why restorative practice 'works', drawing heavily from Affect Script Psychology (ASP). At the outset, I was not familiar with ASP but its core elements are carefully explicated and unpacked to assist the novice to get to grips with the process and to begin to understand its relevance to restorative practice. Before proceeding any further, it is important to address a definitional question, namely what is meant by restorative practice (RP) and restorative justice (RJ), terms often used interchangeably, as I will do throughout? This review is not the place to get into the fine detail of the RP vs. RJ debate. Suffice to say, I find Braithwaite's (2004, p.56) definition to be the most helpful when he describes RJ as: 'a process where all stakeholders affected by an injustice have an opportunity to discuss how they have been affected by the injustice and to decide what should be done to repair the harm'.

In terms of structure, the book is divided into four parts and it presupposes that the reader has a basic understanding of RJ and the concept of face-to-face restorative encounters and conferences. For those to whom ASP is new, Part 1 is essential reading as Vernon Kelly, over the course of two dense chapters, explores the ‘biology of emotion’<sup>1</sup> and introduces the ‘blueprint’ for restorative healing. Central to this overview is close analysis of the work of Silvan Tomkins (1962, 1962) who laid the theoretical foundations of what is today known as ASP. Kelly explains that, ‘An affect is a biological program, wired into the central nervous system of all newborn infants’ and the ‘*affect system* in human brains is comprised of nine affects’ (2014, p. 27). In Chapter 3, Abrahamson (2014, p.87) usefully highlights how from her own practice experience, the nine affects can be ordered hierarchically from the most negative to the most positive<sup>2</sup>. Several quick observations in relation to the affects are merited. Firstly, the preponderance of negative affects (of which there are six) as opposed to neutral (one) or positive affects (two) is striking. Secondly the affects are self-explanatory with the exception of the two most potent, dissmell and disgust. These are helpfully demystified by Abrahamson (2014, p.88) for readers who want to learn more. Thirdly, the list of affects is comprehensive but is it exhaustive? Where for example does love fit?<sup>3</sup>

Kelly then introduces the concept of the Central Blueprint which is essentially the ‘how and why of caring and the primary motivation of all human behaviour’ (2014, p.30). Thus (according to Kelly), humans are biologically driven by four rules:

1. Maximise positive affect
2. Minimise negative affect
3. Minimise the inhibition of affect, and
4. Maximise the power to maximise positive affect, minimize negative affect, and minimise the inhibition of affect.’ (p.30)

Kelly (2014, pp.33-35) then moves on to the concept of *script formation* which stems from the sequence: Stimulus-Affect-Response (SAR). Furthermore, he notes the important differences between affects, emotions and feelings. *Affects* ‘are simply short-lived biological responses to stimulus conditions’, *feelings* describe ‘the situation when someone becomes consciously aware that an affect has been triggered’, while *emotions* are ‘scripted responses, arising from the complex interaction between the social relationships of a child’s birth culture, the child’s inborn temperament and the brain’s motivational and cognitive systems effects on these interactions’. As such, emotion ‘is clearly a bio-psycho-social phenomenon’. In the residential child care context, an awareness of these overlapping and interrelated dimensions of emotion is critical to

<sup>1</sup> For those interested in this aspect of restorative justice, Daniel Reisel’s *Ted* talk from February 2013 on ‘The neuroscience of restorative justice’ is recommended:

[http://www.ted.com/talks/daniel\\_reisel\\_the\\_neuroscience\\_of\\_restorative\\_justice#t-653644](http://www.ted.com/talks/daniel_reisel_the_neuroscience_of_restorative_justice#t-653644)

<sup>2</sup> The nine affects ordered from most negative to most positive are: Dissmell; Disgust; Fear; Anger; Sadness; Shame; Surprise; Interest; and, Joy.

<sup>3</sup> I owe this observation to Laura Steckley (Editor) who spotted love’s absence.

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enabling staff members to decode young people's challenging behaviour and to respond sensitively, appropriately and effectively.

It is only with grounding in these relatively complex concepts derived broadly from the discipline of psychology that the reader can begin to appreciate the relevance of ASP to RJ. Kelly then turns our attention to the *emotions* of shame and guilt which 'have the same biologic starting point - the *affect* shame-humiliation' (2014, pg. 41). Without wishing to get unduly biblical, the old adage 'Hate the sin, love the sinner'<sup>4</sup> is helpful when trying to distinguish shame from guilt. One can commit a deviant act, for which one feels guilty, without being a deviant person who is ashamed of oneself. Shame comes into play when one commits a deviant act but assumes this to be symptomatic of a deviant identity. The act and actor have become inseparable which leads to a 'more intense turning inward to focus on deficits within the self' (2014, p.41). At this juncture, Kelly introduces the Compass of Shame adapted from the work of Donald L. Nathanson (1992) which highlights the four common defences adopted by individuals seeking to alleviate the emotional discomfort of shame. These defences are likely to be extremely familiar to anyone working with vulnerable children and young people in the residential care sector. What do young people experiencing shame do? They lash out (Attack Others), they beat themselves up emotionally (Attack Self), they keep their real feelings to themselves (Withdrawal) and/or they deny wrongdoing (Avoidance). The four points of the compass of shame can account for behaviours from self-harm to absconding, macho posturing to abuse of drugs and alcohol as a form of escapism. Critically, 'Emotional harm happens when circumstances inhibit one's freedom to respond to and eliminate negative affect' (p.50). I would argue that the modern criminal justice system and indeed many disciplinary regimes in residential settings, whether by accident or design, are structured in such a fashion as to render emotional harm all but unavoidable. RJ offers an alternative path.

How then should challenging behaviour be addressed in a manner that does not inflict emotional harm on the individual responsible but does reduce or eliminate its recurrence? Kelly draws together numerous threads outlined in the introductory chapters by emphasising how inherent in all people is 'the interest in others being interested in us and our interest in being interested in them' (p.55). On that basis The Social Discipline Window<sup>5</sup> with its four quadrants (NOT, FOR, TO, WITH) provides a useful template. On a daily basis, practitioners provide young people with support and exercise control. Levels of both may vary on a spectrum from low to high. The practitioner seeking to work restoratively WITH young people will be firm but fair and authoritative, practising in a reintegrative and democratic fashion (2014, pg.57). A Restorative Conference bringing together the person(s) harmed and the person(s) responsible in the aftermath of a harmful incident, along with relevant others (e.g. RJ Facilitator, Family Member(s), Advocacy Worker etc.), 'opens the door for *empathy*' (2014, p.69) because when people speak openly about their feelings *affective resonance* is a biological inevitability: 'when one person expresses anger or fear or joy, those around him will begin to feel angry or fearful or joyful' (2014, p.68).

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<sup>4</sup> Or 'hate the act, love the actor' for the more secularly minded.

<sup>5</sup> Adapted from Watchel (1999); Coloroso (2003); and, Thorsborne and Blood (2013).

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After the theory comes the practice. Parts 2, 3 and 4 of the book examine the theory in action in communities and criminal justice settings (Part 2), in Organizational Settings (Part 3) and in Education (Part 4). While all are absorbing, practitioners in the residential care context are likely to find Part 2 most interesting. It is not my intention to review these practice-oriented chapters in detail save to select a number of particularly informative excerpts. Abramson (Chapter 3) highlights how Community Conferencing in inner-city Baltimore has yielded impressive results both in terms of the volume of disputes resolved (15,000+ between 1998-2013) and the effectiveness of outcomes as regards reduction in reoffending rates, '60 per cent lower than those for court' (2014, p.90). Her case analyses examining the flow of emotions and the accompanying motivations are also instructive. Meanwhile, Lennox's (Chapter 4) perspective on practising restoratively as a Police Officer is absorbing. He provides a useful example which elucidates the dissmell affect. Working with a group of young men involved in an arson attack which destroyed a primary school, Lennox facilitated a conference involving the young men, their family members, representatives from the school and the Fire Service. The location? Symbolically the conference was held in the burned-out husk of the building which had been destroyed where the smoky smell of fire damage still lingered. The dissmell affect was thus triggered by this unpleasant stimulus. Lennox also provides an example of responding creatively to conflict. One of the members of school staff did not feel comfortable attending the conference as her feelings of animosity towards the perpetrators remained too strong. Meanwhile one of the young men's parents was notoriously unreliable and having agreed to attend the conference, failed to appear on the day. Lennox dealt with both these challenges by placing two empty seats in the Conference Circle allowing opportunities for those in attendance to reflect on the reasons for the absence of others with a stake in proceedings. Finally, Hutchison's (Chapter 5) contribution in relation to forgiveness is an extremely powerful and moving account. It demonstrates the power of restorative justice even in the aftermath of serious crime. Following the murder of her husband who was beaten to death having confronted youths in relation to antisocial behaviour, her life was turned upside down. However, she displayed reserves of empathy and understanding that would likely fail many of us. Ultimately she met with the young man responsible when he was finally apprehended and sentenced to custody. She learned that his young life to that point had been a troubled one and Hutchison notes that together they had an opportunity 'to connect around our brokenness' (2014, p.126). She also highlights how forgiveness is not a binary concept. Rather it is dynamic and fluid. One can feel forgiving one day but less so the next depending on events and emotional triggers.

In summary, I found *The Psychology of Emotion in Restorative Practice* to be something of a revelation. It is not an 'easy read' by any means and the psychology-heavy content, particularly in the early stages, may put some readers off. However, it is worth persevering and perhaps this extended review may help towards that end. The practice-oriented chapters do a fine job of reinforcing the key concepts - SAR, the Central Blueprint, the Compass of Shame and the Social Discipline Window - so that by the end of the book they feel reasonably familiar and comprehensible thanks to numerous examples of these theories and models coming to life in practice. Aside from anything else, I have found myself beginning to reflect on my own feelings and behaviours more deeply. Tottenham Hotspur get a late winner (enjoyment-joy affect) (POSITIVE), the postman arrives at the door with an unexpectedly large parcel (surprise-startle affect) (NEUTRAL)

or I observe some ignorant, able-bodied idiot parking in a Disabled Space close to the door of Tesco (anger-rage affect) (NEGATIVE). Ultimately, ASP helps to make sense of RJ. It helps to explain why what feels like a good idea is a good idea. The next step surely is to consider how restorative ways of working in our children's homes, secure units, courts, prisons, schools and beyond can become more fully embedded. There has been too much shaming for too long, too much stigmatising of emotionally vulnerable and often volatile young people. Is it perhaps time to try something different?

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