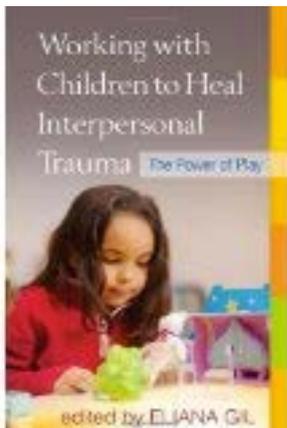


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Innocence Found

A review of

Working With Children to Heal Interpersonal Trauma: The Power of Play by Eliana Gil (Ed.) New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2010. 336 pp. ISBN 978-1-60623-892-9 \$40.00

Reviewed by

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The story I am going to tell comes from a place deep inside of myself, a place that perceives all that I have irremediably lost and, perhaps, what gain there is behind the loss. If some people forget their past as a way to survive, other people remember it for the same reason. When cultures with contradictory versions of reality collide, children are often the casualties of that contact. So, like many dark children of the African continent, my childhood was short, far too short to be called a childhood. This is perhaps why it has stuck so vividly in my memory.

(Malidoma Patrice Some, 1994, p. 14)

After reading *Working With Children to Heal Interpersonal Trauma: The Power of Play*, edited by Eliana Gil, I feel that, as a science, psychology is approaching a renaissance in the study of the healing of the mind and soul. At this time in the history of our species, we are witnessing widespread war, poverty, familial violence, and sexual violence at such a scale that it may be unprecedented in human history. The casualties are children. Those children who experience trauma are many times left to fend for themselves because American society views children as resilient warriors who will in the long term heal themselves. Although children are resilient, children who suffer from interpersonal trauma carry scars from the abuse well into adulthood.

Working With Children to Heal Interpersonal Trauma chronicles the stories of courageous children and healers: wounded children and wounded healers. Before I read this book, I had a limited awareness of play therapy as a tool in the healing of children. The book is organized into two parts. Part One discusses the extent of interpersonal childhood trauma and its impact in lives of children; Part Two discusses clinical responses of therapists who work with traumatized children.

Eliana Gil and the other contributors to this book discuss the need for individual assessments and specifically individualized modes of treatment for traumatized children. Gil states that this book honors children's reparative processes by empathically valuing their own healing strategies. Many of the authors in this volume have extensive backgrounds in Jungian/analytical psychology. Jung's ideas on archetypes and the collective unconscious are known but often overlooked in many undergraduate and graduate training programs in psychology.

It is amazing that Jungian/analytical psychology is used as a healing modality in play therapy, given that many theorists minimize the value of play in America. For example, Simms in her chapter, "Play and the Transformation of Feeling: Niki's Case," discusses the negative perception that American education has toward play:

The neglect or even disdain for play in American education has deep roots. Decades ago Piaget was asked by American educators how to speed up the developmental process in preoperational, young children. This has become known as the "American Question." Piaget's reply was: "But why would you want to do that?" I share Piaget's puzzlement, together with Spack, Brazelton, Elkind, and Greenspan. (p. 323)

In our society, which values productivity and performance at all costs, play may be seen as unnecessary and a waste of time. However, in reference to the work of Jung, whose

research led him to live and study in so-called primitive cultures from Native American and precolonial Christian to Islamic Africa, Jung found that these cultures were the originators of symbolic play, dreams analysis, myths, and legends that heal the mind, body, and spirit.

Working With Children to Heal Interpersonal Trauma unabashedly uses the work of Jung and, if I dare say, not his ideas but his introduction to ancient wisdom of emotional and spiritual healing techniques that humans have used for thousands of years. This text reminds us that as wounded healers, we do not heal the child or the person-rather, we facilitate the healing; the child charts his or her own healing, if we simply let him or her engage in being.

What I found impressive are the authors' discussions and analysis related to Judaic tradition, myths, and legends. Rosalind L. Heiko's chapter, "Finding the Treasure Within: Spontaneous Storytelling and the Sand play Journey of an Emotionally Despairing Girl," is brilliant in this aspect. In her story about a girl named Stella, who suffered from depression and used sand-play therapy in her healing, Heiko refers to the Judaic story of Moses and the burning bush to describe a tray Stella worked on. In the story of Moses and the burning bush, God comforts Moses by saying, "H'neini," meaning "I am here," after Moses sees the burning bush. After Moses faces his fear, Moses calls out "H'neini" ("Here I am"). Heiko states that this story illustrates the need to take responsibility for oneself and one's needs, to pay attention, and to be present to ourselves.

According to Bynum (1999), in Jewish families the parent is often looking for the child to be an illui, or genius. In the orthodox or religious community, the little illui who can deliver learned discussions of the Hebrew texts, or drushas, is highly praised. There is the famous passage in the Zohar, the foundational work of the Jewish book of mysticism, the Kabbalah, in which Rabbi Abba and the other rabbis turn to a young boy for elucidation of an esoteric "midnight" issue, hoping that the child will clarify and be the voice of the lamp. In Jewish families, the children's insights and opinions are highly valued, and it would not be unusual for parents to take great pride in the contributions of their children to the solution of a problem (Bynum, 1999). The therapists, like the Jewish parents, value the genius of the little illui in developing solutions for their healing.

Like the opening quotation at the beginning of this review, this book illustrates the need to consider different therapeutic treatments, such as Jungian psychology, to heal interpersonal trauma in children. Play therapy is one tool that is helpful. It may be hard for children to discuss the trauma that they have experienced, but play therapy allows children to go to that deep place inside of themselves so they may heal.

References

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