

## From Terrorism to Trust: Trusting our Nature?

Mary-Jayne Rust

Jungian Analyst (Society of Analytical Psychology) and Art Therapist.

What does it really mean to trust someone or something? Faith, belief, hope, dependence, reliance, confidence, solidity, are words that come to mind in relation to notion of trust. Being able to trust another person, situation, group, animal, or object, is a very precious thing in today's modern world. The crumbling of deep trust can be a disturbing, and even visceral experience, as if the rug is pulled from beneath one's feet. One's stomach lurches, as if the solid matter on which one stood, on which one depends without thinking, is suddenly gone. The disappearance of ground is, indeed, terrifying.

In this chapter I will be exploring the decline of trust within our society, how this has happened, and how it might be rebuilt. I will start by drawing on my experience as a psychotherapist, where I have witnessed deep transformations in clients who are able to regain trust in their bodies, and in themselves. I will ask whether we might recover trust within our society in a similar way.

### Trusting our bodies and ourselves.

As a psychotherapist I work with people on a one-to-one basis. It is often the case that a client has had untrustworthy parents or guardians, and finds it very hard to trust subsequent relationships. I work with the belief that these past patterns may begin to alter over time if we can together create a trustworthy therapeutic relationship, within which we can examine what it means to trust another person.

There are many ways in which we could investigate trust within the inner world; here I have chosen one thread. As a therapist who specializes in the area of eating problems, I encounter people, mainly women, who cannot trust their own body. They feel that bodily instincts will lead them 'into temptation'. The body must therefore be kept under control. Through years of mistrusting their own bodily and emotional signals, these women have learnt to rely on information from outside of themselves, such as diets or doctors, to tell them how, what and when to eat. They cannot trust themselves to know what they need, as if their very 'inner ground' has been eroded.

Research shows that more and more women, and increasingly men, are suffering from eating problems; this is not just a medical problem for a few individuals. In fact, yo-yo dieting has become so widespread that it is thought of as normal for a woman to be worried about the size and shape of her body. In 1990 the Psychiatrist General of the USA said, **'It is dangerous for a woman NOT to be on a diet'**. Such a statement reveals a tremendous fearfulness about our own nature, a terror that if we let go and give into ourselves, chaos will result.

How has this situation come about? For many of these women it is the mother, in particular, who will have passed on a similar distrust in her own body (Eichenbaum &

Orbach). But we cannot blame just one part of a whole system. It is easy to see that we are surrounded by images within the media which make ordinary women feel bad about themselves. In addition, we are taught from an early age that sensual desire is something that leads one astray, and needs to be kept under control. Such attitudes are very deep rooted, and can be traced back to the beginnings of patriarchal religions and throughout Western philosophy.

Although it is a completely revolutionary idea for most of my clients, the good news is that ***the body can be trusted***. However, such re-learning takes time. It means turning around, and questioning, family and cultural belief systems. It requires attentive listening to the cacophony of voices, feelings, instincts, and desires that inhabit one's inner world, in order to recognize, and get to know, the trustworthy parts of the self, including the body.

What has happened for a woman with an eating problem is that she has learned to respond to many, if not all of these signals, with a food panacea, which acts like a quick fix, but which is ultimately very unsatisfying. Often her deepest longings, and hunger for life, have been converted into physical hunger and plugged up with food, leaving her rudderless and unfamiliar with herself.

To begin with, emotional and physical hungers need to be distinguished from one another. This requires a capacity to 'think about and feel', rather than rushing into action. When a woman can recognise and respond to physical hunger, she realizes that the body gives clear signals about when, how much and what to eat. If she can truly give herself permission to eat whatever she likes when physically hungry, those denied or 'bad' foods soon lose their allure. In a similar way, emotional hunger must be unpacked and responded to. Frustration needs to be named, and tolerated, when a hunger cannot be satisfied instantly. Gradually, all kinds of hungers can be distinguished from one another, and responded to appropriately. Such yearnings can then be trusted to guide the individual through life, rather than feared as terrible desires which mislead.

Learning to ***trust in oneself*** is not, then, a simple matter of trusting one's instincts or intuition, and instantly following. It is a negotiation between the different parts of oneself, between thinking, feeling, sensation, instinct and intuition, as if these aspects form an internal 'committee', giving one different pieces of information. This 'committee' needs to listen to, and respect, all points of view and work together in giving the 'Self' guidance.

This trust can only come about through moment to moment awareness, learning to discriminate between the myriad of voices, to find which are trustworthy. This is not about domination or colonization, where one part of the self takes over, and issues orders to another, for fear that this unruly or wild part of the self will take over. It is about mutual respect for all parts of the system, recognizing the body is not inferior to the mind. Such is the process of establishing one's inner ground.

## Trust in the Wider Sphere.

What of trust in our wider society? Research shows that it is breaking down<sup>i</sup> and that as our industrial growth society spreads throughout the world, we can witness the breakdown of trust spreading alongside it. A stark example of such a change can be seen in Ladakh, northern India, whose borders were closed until the mid 1970's due to its proximity to China. In this traditional, sustainable culture, there was virtually no stealing or crime. Nothing was locked up. Trust was possible because of the very tight interdependence that each person had on the other to survive. Because communities were small and not mobile, everybody would know instantly of any stealing, and who was the thief. In any case, there was little or no difference in wealth within the population. Possessions were of the minimum, so what would be the point in stealing? Such experiences of other cultures remind us of a kind of trust that has been forgotten. In the last 30 years there has been massive changes in Ladakhi society due to the influence of Western culture. Theft, violence and crime are on the increase, while trust is being eroded. This reveals clearly the social impact of economic change, the effects of globalisation. (see Norberg-Hodge, H 1992)

What are the indicators of this decline in trust in our society? Our institutions, such as the church, the state, the monarchy, the justice system and the police force are increasingly being exposed as untrustworthy, from wrongful imprisonment, to paedophile priests, to corrupt politicians. The need to be security-conscious is increasing. Many of my readers can probably remember a time when security did not need to be so tight. When I was a child, we never locked up the house when we went out for the day. Even more incredulous to me now, it was possible to leave our car in the town market place, unlocked, with the keys in the ignition, and go shopping!

Other indicators are harder to see, such as the breakdown of trust in objects, not just people. We no longer know the origins of things. Take food, for example. What do we know of its source (apart from the country on the label)? What are its potentially harmful contents (e.g. pesticides)? Have the people involved in its production been fairly treated? A recent scandal exposed chocolate manufacturers in Africa, using cocoa grown on plantations using slaves. Such a system was revealed to be driven by the world market, cocoa growers having to compete with ever falling prices, and being unable to sustain a system with fairly paid employers. Likewise, we have little means of checking on sources of our clothes, furniture, and most objects in our daily use.

We can no longer check for ourselves whether most the things we use everyday come from a reliable source. We may be harmed by these products and, just as importantly, we may be harming humans and/or the environment by supporting their manufacture. Just two generations ago many of our products in use would have been sourced locally. Now we have to rely on 'the word of others' to know whether we can trust these products. It is a daunting thing to realize that 'others' may lie about origins of things, making it extremely hard for the consumer to know what to trust. Most people rely on blind trust.

How can we then feel good about our own integrity when we may be imbibing all kinds of things made and grown with such ill treatment?

There are other factors very basic to our survival. Can we trust the air we breath, the water we drink? And what of our future? Such loss of trust in the assuredness of our very Earth is a very hard reality to live with.

*“Until the late twentieth century, every generation throughout history lived with the tacit certainty that there would be generations to follow. Each assumed, without questioning, that its children and children’s children would walk the same earth, under the same sky. Hardships, failures, and personal death were encompassed in that vaster assurance of continuity. That certainty is now lost to us, whatever our politics. That loss, unmeasured and immeasurable, is the pivotal psychological reality of our time.”*

(‘Widening Circles’ Joanna Macy. P241.)

### What is happening here?

How can we understand such a decline in trust in so many areas of life? To some extent, we can place some of these difficulties within the context of our consumer society, which parallels these issues. We are taught that it is good to take more in, and grow larger, to fuel the economy. Business has preyed on the vulnerability of individuals, cleverly finding ways to seduce people into consuming far more than they need, taking away their confidence in themselves, in order to rely on others for guidance.

A capitalist culture encourages the building of material wealth above all other values, and encourages individuals to compete against one another, rather than to co-operate. Placing such a high value on profit has dismantled bonds of trust within society, within communities, and between individuals.

But the idea that the body, our instincts or ‘nature’, and even nature herself, are not to be trusted, has been around for a very long time. Western philosophy, and most of the major religions for the last two millennia, have preached about the evils of the body. We must transcend sensuality and instinct, and listen to the mind. We must control and dominate our nature.

One reason why this might have come about is a simple one: humans were not content to live as hunter-gatherers, but wished to have more control over their environment, to create a safe space, not at the mercy of fate or the gods. This shift, from being part of, to having dominance over, was of major proportions and was the start of human colonization of the earth. It has given humans permission, believing they were the crown of creation, to massively exploit the earth and all her creatures.

We can see this still continuing, in our industrial growth society, with the rapid and dramatic developments of modern science and medicine, on the verge of cloning, and promising one day to discover the secret of immortality. We now seem to be under the illusion that we are totally in charge, wanting to become gods ourselves.

I suppose the fantasy is that by creating a safer place for ourselves, we will create a greater sense of trust in our society and environment. Ironically, the exact reverse has come about. We have created the most untrustworthy, unstable state our planet has experienced since the appearance of our species. This reminds me of the anorexic girl who achieves mastery over her hunger, dominating her bodily needs, only to find herself close to death in hospital.

Colonisation, through domination of nature, and of our nature, does not achieve trust. It can only create a situation where a small part of the system is attempting to control the rest, perceived as wild, bad or evil. Far from generating trust, colonization generates a terror of 'the other', that which we are trying to control. In so doing it creates terrorism and terrorists.

### **Can We Recover Trust in Modern Society?**

So what does create trust? Can we learn anything from the process of regaining trust in the body and the self, that I have described earlier, which can be applied to our wider society?

There appear to be several key factors in the process of regaining trust:

- listening carefully to all the different parts of any system, whether it be our internal worlds, an organization, or a community.
- respecting all parts of that system
- fostering co-operation between all parts of that system, so that they can work together, rather than competing
- trying to avoid domination as a means of controlling fear
- cultivating the capacity to consider in the face of immediate action
- being aware of the shadow side of that system, anything which is pushed to the margins, or pushed out, and what it might be telling us.

Trusting one's fellow beings, and the world around, requires a change in perspective, from a place of omnipotence to a place of humility, in the realization we cannot completely control our fate, however scientifically advanced we are. Climbing down from the position of 'crown of creation', to take up an ordinary place in the web of life, demonstrates this humility.

Eichenbaum, L & Orbach, S *Outside in Inside Out: Women's Psychology: A Feminist Approach*. Harmondsworth, Penguin 1982.

Macy, J (2000) *Widening Circles Gabriola Island*: New Society Publishers.

Norberg-Hodge, H (1992) *Ancient Futures* London: Rider.

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<sup>i</sup> Research as cited in 'The Foundations of Trust' by Robert Wuthnow  
[www.puaf.umd.edu/IPPP/summer98/foundations\\_of\\_trust.htm](http://www.puaf.umd.edu/IPPP/summer98/foundations_of_trust.htm)

