

Confidentiality under threat

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I was sitting on the train the other day as you do. No one seems to talk to each other on the train. Then of course when a mobile phone rings and the person answers everyone eavesdrops in on the conversation trying to work out what the other party said by the reply the person gives. Well that's what I do anyway

As I was sitting there, there was a poster on the other side of the train right in front of me. On it was a picture of Australia with big letters that read "Border Security". Then it had the 1800 border security hotline phone number. It stated that Australian's needed to keep their eyes and ears open to help in the fight against terrorism. If you have seen or heard anything, even if it seemed trivial, you were asked to report it to the hotline.



Border security

So I thought about what I had seen and heard lately, as you do. Couldn't think of too many things except for a few things two different people had said to me in recent times. As a counsellor I meet lots of people who tell me lots of things. Because there is the 'vow' of confidentiality people will tell me more things than usual because they know I would not pass the information onto any others. In other words I keep their secrets.

The two possible breaches of border security relate to what two different clients have said. The first is a man in his late 20s. He is a computer geek who spends much of his time at his computer terminal. As he does, he usually reports to me what he has been doing on his computer, only half of which I can understand because it is computer speak. The other day whilst telling me some of the various porno sites he had visited he stated that he came across a site that was about weapons and bombs, how to purchase them and so forth.

So there we have it. Should I contact the 1800 border security hotline?. They say, "no matter how trivial the information may seem". This man had told me that he had accessed information on how to get in contact with munitions suppliers. If he had been a muslim or of middle eastern ethnicity should I then ring 1800? The poster had urged me to break client confidentiality in this instance.

The second example is of a man in his late 40s. I have been treating him for some time now and he has strong views on a variety of matters. Not uncommonly he will launch into an angry tirade on how corrupt and hypocritical the Australian government is on matters such as Israel, Afghanistan and Iraq. His emotion on these issues is quite strong. Could one call him fanatical about such matters? Possibly. If he was a muslim or of middle eastern ethnicity would I be more likely to break confidentiality then. I suppose one would even though that is discriminatory I suppose.

We live in times where the government thinks secrets are dangerous and sometimes they are. And sometimes they are not. Confidentiality is all about secrets. Confidentiality is secrecy.

Confidentiality is one of the main services that counsellors can offer the public. When humans are troubled by their thoughts and feelings or something they may have done in the past then they can suffer terribly until they can get it out. And that means by and large to talk about it to some one who is prepared to listen, particularly if they are sympathetic. That can have powerful therapeutic value.

Humans are much more psychologically healthy if they feel they are not emotionally alone. To tell someone your inner most thoughts makes one feel not alone or like they belong with someone. Humans also are much better psychologically if they can get some form of catharsis about things that are troubling them. That in essence involves expressing their emotions about troubling events in one's life. There has to be confidentiality for that to be of any real therapeutic value.



Aloneness

We need to be very careful as to what the government wants us to report. We need to be careful if the government requires us to break confidentiality more and more. Counselling is secret by its very nature. If we are required to tell these secrets then we and the community are in trouble. All it will take is one highly publicised case of a counsellor reporting what a client said about his political views and the impact on the profession could be significant.

The other difficulty occurs when governments make more and more mandatory reporting laws about more and more areas. (I don't mean just the mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse). What happens is the public quickly learn this and those who are serious about say suicide, simply don't talk about it because they know they will be reported.

Mandatory reporting is a double edged sword.
The more mandatory reporting =
the less confidentiality =
less catharsis =

more of a sense of aloneness in the community =
deterioration of the overall psychological health in the community.



Mandatory reporting = Don't say anything

Border security mindset - paranoia?

In these times of post Bali Bombing and so forth it is interesting to watch the phenomena of paranoia. It seems safe to say that at this time there is a heightened awareness of threat to our safety. People are looking for danger in the hope that they can avoid it.



When does that cross the line and become paranoia?
Are you paranoid if you think people are out to get you, when they actually are?

These days one hears comments such that all Google searches are now possibly monitored by the security services. We are told that security services now have much more wide ranging powers and the public have let this happen with very little or no protest at all.



(Homeland security. They are everywhere, watching and listening just so you can feel safe).

In this scenario paranoid thinking can set in.

"My phone is tapped, they are watching me. I am a marked man for the anti terrorists!! Lets also be realistic here. If a terrorist was going to do a search

on Google on something like "Bomb making for beginners", do you really think they would use their own computer. No, they would use someone else's unless you are a very dumb terrorist with a very short career. Hey there is an idea, if I want to get someone else into a trouble, I will just sneak in and do such a search on their computer - "Bomb making for intermediates". Wait a minute. Maybe someone has done that on my computer already!!"



This is a good pictorial representation of the Child ego state of the paranoid individual. The anxiety that is inside the person which is usually covered by the anger and control that the world sees in the paranoid.

"All this security is making me feel so safe I can't take it man. They know so much about me, my name, my address, my DNA, my identity card number, what Google searches I do, what phone calls I make, what credit cards I use and for what. All this so I can live in freedom".

This is the paradox that the paranoid person can find them self in