

The Denigrated Other: Diversity and Group Relations

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“And the whole earth was of one language and one speech... And they said let us build a city and a tower whose top my reach unto heaven...and the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men had built... And the Lord said the people are one and they have all one language... let us confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. So the Lord scattered them abroad from there upon the face of all the earth... Therefore the name of it called Babel.” (Genesis, 11, 1-10).

Bion (1961) proposed that the Oedipus, Garden of Eden, and Tower of Babel myths reflect a universal and deep ambivalence about self-knowledge and knowledge about others with whom we are linked. From Bion’s perspective, we cannot possess absolute knowledge about human relations, rather our lives are lived on a frontier where collaborative learning through experience pushes the frontier but never conquers it. The God of the Babel myth reacts to the human pursuit of knowledge, symbolized by the building of the tower, by splitting us into factions rendered unable to understand each other. This God can be understood as that aspect of human jealousy that guards an illusion of omniscience and avoids painful self-knowledge. It attacks the links with groups of others that provide the potential for social learning. It denigrates the other.

This chapter explores the dynamics of diversity utilizing the work of Bion and other psychoanalytic thinkers. The Group Relations conference as a laboratory to study the unconscious aspects of these dynamics will be considered. This chapter is an extension and revision of a paper presented in 1991 at the A. K. Rice Institute (AKRI) Scientific Meeting in St. Louis, MO. The original article, published in the proceedings of the meeting, was based on learning from the first diversity themed Group Relations conference held in June, 1989. Continuously since that time, the Washington-Baltimore Affiliate and the Howard University Counseling Service have co-sponsored an annual conference on some variant of the title “Diversity and Authority.” The “diversity” and “identity” themes have become commonplace in AKRI conferences, including one national conference and several conferences sponsored by regional centers. Two conferences, one with an entirely African-American staff and another focused on “Whiteness” as

a racial construct, were noteworthy efforts to extend the boundaries of the theme into more passionately and tightly held areas of study.

A consequence of the presence of the theme in its various forms is that many new consultants to Group Relations work, especially on the East Coast, had their first conference experiences in the “diversity era.” As such, the centrality of one’s identity as a consultant and the social identity of the conference membership strongly influence the focus of the learning. In an emerging construction, authority is increasingly viewed as a function of identity and diversity. Many early diversity conference staffs gave considerable attention on where to place the balance of emphasis between diversity and authority. Even in more recent conferences with no explicit theme of diversity, the importance of diversity and identity as a part of authority is seen as essentially continuous.

THE CHALLENGE OF DIVERSITY

Towering advances in science and technology have brought all peoples of the world into close proximity. Whether we can forge links and develop a common language remains to be seen. Provided with the means to enrich each other or provoke Armageddon, we must learn to manage a global intergroup event or self-destruct—too often we hear the words of the other as “babel.” Relations and communication between diverse cultures continue to be confounded by paranoia, hatred, envy, failure to understand differences, and perhaps a lingering conviction that acceptance of the “other” is against the divine order. Bion’s (1977) assertion of the moving from a paranoid position to a depressive position or reowning noxious mental contents that have been evacuated into the other entailed the experience of catastrophic change that is invariably resisted by the prevailing establishment. Throughout human history, our wars have been ignited when the volatile boundaries of world interdependence and cooperation explosively collapse. We once more find ourselves confronted with competition for scarce resources, often inflamed by differences in identity. With these wars comes primitive, paranoid processes and destructive behavior that divides people one from another.

Einstein commented that when we split the atom we changed everything but the way we think. In the face of rapid changes that throw diverse peoples into new groupings and blur boundaries, the multicultural movement has been developed to promote mutual acceptance of differences and to preserve the rights of established cultures to continue to exist. In some instances, a more ethnocentric approach is taken as a response to the changes in the global boundaries, witnessed in the self-segregation of groups around salient identity characteristics. While responding to threats to the integrity of groups by returning to roots “or following an antique drum” (Eliot, 1943, p. 56) may have an important role in bolstering one’s sense of identity in confusing times, it does not in itself take into account the need for a world culture that can put differences between people into perspective. An appeal

to narcissism and exaggeration of small differences between peoples runs the risk of fostering the illusion of pseudo species (Erikson, 1964).

Attempts to challenge the way we think about diversity occurs on college campuses through myriad courses on the topic and in businesses through “diversity training.” In these efforts, the focus is often on increasing the appreciation of and sensitivity to cultural and racial differences. At deeper levels, groups seek to break down insularity, enrich experience through interaction with the “other,” and confront the problem in our thinking. Too often, “politically correct speech” and other manifestations growing out of sensitivity to communication across boundaries run the risk of producing change without addressing the need to produce meaningful internal shifts in attitudes about those who are different. Radical political approaches may risk merely exchanging roles of oppressed and oppressor, as revolutions in Europe, Africa, and the Americas illustrate. While this exchange may be understandably welcome to those who have been oppressed, the oppressive dynamic remains untouched (Chené, 2000). Only the face of the oppression has revolved, not the oppression itself.

THE RELEVANCE OF UNCONSCIOUS GROUP PROCESS FOR IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY

Bion’s (1961) seminal insights about unconscious group process may have provided a useful dynamic framework with which to sort through the conundrums of diversity. Bion has shown that while group membership is essential for the individual, emotional involvement with the group threatens the viability of the individual at the core. It unleashes psychotic anxieties contained by collective defenses: the basic assumptions. Slater (1966) has shown how groups elaborate on basic assumption phenomena through the development of myths, rituals, symbols, and religious beliefs to build a group culture. While the unconscious collusive process that sustains group basic assumptions is largely an intragroup process, what cannot be contained or integrated within the group is projected into the “other” or “not me” groups. The shared fantasy of the “other group” as fundamentally different, usually in terms of negative attributions, may play a crucial role in the evolution of a differentiated group identity and character development of its members (Smith & Berg, 1987).

The drive to dichotomize is inherent in neuropsychological processes and in the most primal process of differentiation of self from other. The world is divided into what is avoided and what is sought, or in Kleinian terms, divided into a good breast or a bad. Social discrimination of what is good or bad is enculturated in the individual through group process. As expressed by Pinderhughes (1971):

Group members idealize and encourage in the group those body parts, products, and behaviors which are uniting, and they denigrate and discourage in the group those body parts, products, and behaviors which are disruptive. Excretory and sexual function, hostility and other discomfoting

behavior or stimuli are suppressed in group members for institutionalized expression in private behavior, in symbolic group rituals (arts, dancing, sport, etc.) or for repression and projection upon outside targets of the group member's paranoia.

The subtlety of cultural transmission of denigration of the "other" is further shown in a Lacanian analysis of language. Lacan (1977) believed that the symbolic register of our mind is shaped by the culture into which we are born. Our birth into a specific culture brings with it history and practices that form the basis not only for our means of verbal communication, but also provides the fabric of our unconscious mind.

Without the symbolic order derived from culture, an individual would be relegated to autism or psychosis. Lacan asserted that while this invasion of the culture by the mother tongue was essential to being linked to humanity, it also created false defensive images of the self and others. For example, one might consider how the chain of signifiers related to the word *black* in English and European languages affects our perceptions of people in relation to skin pigmentation. The signifiers for the word *black* are mostly pejorative: bad, dirty, evil, occult. In contrast, the symbolic chain of signifiers for the word *white* are mostly positive: pure, good, clean, and fair. Not surprisingly, in many African cultures, the nature and meaning of these signifiers are reversed (Somé, 1995).

In our increasingly pluralistic society and shrinking world, increased discourse between groups confronts us with an array of challenges. Most of these challenges, while formidable, are amenable to the sustained efforts of respective work groups and those who advocate a multicultural approach to human relations. The unconscious use of the "other group" as a fundamental part of the intragroup defense system and a building block for group and individual identity may turn out to be the most intractable obstacle to effective intercultural intergroup relations. In other words, the threatened loss of the denigrated unconscious fantasy of the "other" through increased transactions across boundaries may threaten the fabric of the paranoid processes that have sustained identity since human time began and lead to a reactive exacerbation of conflict.

It might follow from this perspective that ferreting out this irrationality and replacing it with reason could produce a great advance in more constructive intergroup relations. It is hard to imagine human beings and much less groups or cultures, however, functioning primarily by reason. As Bion stated, "Reason is emotion's slave and exists to rationalize emotional experience" (Bion, 1977, p. 1). For example, in the Russian Communist experiment, draconian measures to stamp out the "irrationality" of religion, ethnocentrism, and other aspects of the old culture resulted in a unified shared culture of impoverishment generating a new and perhaps more malignant irrationality. Contending successfully with the irrationality of intergroup relations between diverse groups may defy most simple, straightforward solutions. Once these measures to force human groups towards rationality and "unity" collapse, we experience ethnic balkanization and the re-emergence of ancient tribal conflicts.

BASIC ASSUMPTION CULTURE

Turquet (1974) has underscored the dual nature of the irrationality of basic assumption culture and how its vicissitudes can determine the character and effectiveness of the group. The basic assumption can be the enemy of the work group, reducing potentially creative group members into dependent numbskulls or quixotic dreamers. Perhaps most important for intergroup relations, it can mass produce blind warriors bent on destroying another group that it knows primarily through its projections. On the other hand, the basic assumption culture can provide an essential tapestry of myths, rituals, traditions, language, and beliefs that make group life coherent, more productive, and rich. When extrapolated to groups, such as family, tribe, religion, nation, and race enabling us to maintain our identity, it is basic assumption culture that provides meaning to an otherwise cold and foreboding universe (Rothman, 1997). Basic assumption culture also provides a matrix and pathway for development of the individual and necessary buffers against existential terrors, including the inevitability of death. From this perspective, the basic assumption culture has two faces, a duality, a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde quality one mythic, spiritual, responsible, and reflective; the other primitive, concrete, aggressive, and action-oriented.

For example, the cultural myth of the “promised land” can serve as an inspiring metaphor about persistence, courage, and faith in the face of trials and privation leading to a transcendent new “place to be.” This might provide an empathic understanding of the suffering of self and others. The “promised land” can also be invoked to justify an entitlement to a specific, disputed territory that is likely to fuel border conflicts or war. Thus, a group can use the same myth as the content for a paranoid-schizoid position that fosters competitive aggression with an enemy or as the content of a depressive position that underscores a universal truth about growth through suffering, each interpretation exerting a very different impact on the relations with other groups.

Klein (1959) developed the notion that the paranoid schizoid and depressive positions were not simply developmental steps to be mastered in childhood but were also models of experience that fluctuate throughout adult life. Bion (1977) thought of these positions or modes of experience as alternating in cycles of disintegration, projection, reintroduction, and integration of experience related in a dialectic, one making the existence of the other possible, like night and day. The paranoid-schizoid mode can be a source of power, aggressive energy, and vitality, while the depressive position is a source of restraining guilt, understanding of self, and the other and of love. Being fixed in either position leads to pathology: self-aggrandizement, exploitation, and oppression of the “other” fueled by greed and envy in the paranoid schizoid mode of experience. In the depressive position, it can lead to paralysis induced by guilt and introjection of denigrating projections from the “other.” In an analogous way, the basic assumption culture can be seen to exist in a dialectic form, one paranoid, the other depressive, in which it is fixation that leads to pathology both within the group and in relations with other groups.

THE GENESIS OF DENIGRATION AND THE DOMINANCE OF THE PARANOID SCHIZOID POSITION

The case can be made that despite the remarkable advances in science and technology, dominant cultures of the world and their interactions remain characterized by and mired in primitive paranoid schizoid processes that stultify growth. Campbell (1968) has argued that the dominant contemporary cultures are struggling because they are stripped of relevant myths. Most of the myths that served traditional cultures well are now anachronistic. They are preserved in concrete desiccated forms that clash with current scientific information about our world, while their dogmatism and splitting fit quite snugly into a paranoid schizoid mode of thinking.

Nations, religions, and ethnic groups in the grip of primitive basic assumption cultures are often driven by greed, suspicion, idealization of self, denigration of the other, and quest for dominance rather than for their own growth and development. Too often political groups, like the prototypical borderline, behave greedily and aggressively while maintaining a façade of goodness and rationality, aided by denial, splitting, and projective identification. Imperialism as a common example involves aggressively stealing what belongs to another and then projectively identifying into this "other" greed and primitiveness. Oppressed groups or cultures are often locked in the depressive mode and become susceptible to the introjection of denigrating projections.

Applying Bion's model of the contained and the container (1977), groups can be seen to use each other in these stagnant conditions, as non-functioning or parasitic containers. What is projectively identified into the other is not modified or processed into alpha-elements available for thought and growth, but remain as beta-elements that are passed back and forth in an escalating process that too often culminates in violence. Like the psychotic personality that uses pathological projective identification, the other is perceived as a "bizarre object" (Bion, 1977) illustrated in the caricatured propaganda portraits of an enemy as non-human beasts. If we are to avoid catastrophe, there is a compelling need for groups to develop the capacity to free themselves from fixation in paranoid-schizoid relations.

Kafka (1989) made a similar point in addressing the multiple dimensions of reality. He suggested that it is not so much the unrecog- nized, contradictory messages that drive a vulnerable family member into schizophrenia as the Bateson "double bind" hypothesis asserts. Rather, it is the intolerance of contradiction, ambiguity, paradox, and multiple realities inherent in human experience that is pathogenic. The individual raised in a family steeped in a rigid ideology and value system is susceptible to schizophrenic breakdown when confronted with the complexities of life outside the family. When applied to the world intergroup, an intolerant culture predisposes itself to breakdown into fanaticism or paranoid xenophobia when confronted with the complexities of interaction in the wider world.

A DIFFERENT COVENANT: THE NEED FOR DIALECTIC, MULTIPLE REALITIES, AND CONTAINERS

This shift toward growth and identity based on multiple realities and membership in the larger human family involves relinquishing of unconsciously held omnipotence, omniscience, innocence, self-aggrandizement, and the certainty of an unambiguous reality and identity. These losses, which Bion describes as catastrophic, are likely to shake the foundations of the collective psyche. Fall-out of intense anxiety, narcissistic rage, hatred and guilt needs to be contained and converted into thought and understanding if the developmental process is not to be derailed by resistance or result in chaos (Heifetz, 1994). Some states in Eastern Europe and Africa seem to be miraculously pulling themselves out of the mire, while others seem to be sinking into ethnic and tribal paranoia characterized by destructive hatred.

Sub-groups within larger ethnic, tribal, religious, or political groups initiate leadership toward a more integrated depressive organization. They often become sequestered containers themselves, however, holding what is threatening to the larger group. They are subject to persecution, labeled as traitorous, and overwhelmed by the more paranoid fight leaders and paranoid basic assumptions that pander to the primitive anxieties and conceits of the majority. This dynamic dominated the American culture during the McCarthy era. In the multicultural era, the dynamic can be found in how those from an identifiable group can be ostracized, rejected, and alienated from “their own” when they make efforts to bridge to the “other” (West, 1994).

A movement for change occasionally arises from a group in a subservient relationship with a dominating group (Palmer, 1999). Having introjected denigrating projections from the dominant group, they are fixed in a more depressive orientation. Fanon (1952), utilizing principles derived from Hegelian dialectic, suggested that the stagnation can be broken when the oppressed reject the role of the abused container and risk their lives for freedom to be whole without rejecting the humanity as the oppressor. By appealing to the humanity of the oppressor, they can be seen as functioning as a growth-promoting container through holding and then returning projections to the depleted oppressor in a modified form usable for thought. Movements led by Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. as well as efforts by the Dalai Lama are examples of this process.

International, political, legal, and human rights organizations such as the United Nations, the World Court, and Amnesty International can be seen as attempts to create entities that serve as functioning containers in the world intergroup process. Their usefulness is precarious primarily because of problems of authorization. Groups are reluctant to authorize supranational organizations in a meaningful way, both because they resist subordinating their interests to those of another group and because they doubt that such organizations are what they purport to be—rather than front organizations that covertly pursue politics of the powerful. During times of crisis when these organizations are most needed, they often fail because of weak authorization and are then overwhelmed by paranoid-schizoid dynamics couched in terms of the primacy of national interest.

THE GROUP RELATIONS CONFERENCE AND DIVERSITY

Can the Tavistock model of a Group Relations conference contribute to the understanding and working through of the challenges of diversity? Allport (1958) wrote in *The Nature of Prejudice*:

Prejudice may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. This effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports—and provided it is of the sort that leads to the perception of common interest and common humanity between members of groups (p. 267).

The Group Relations conference theoretically should offer these conditions. As a temporary institution, it can provide a bounded environment where individuals identified with or representing diverse groups can shed polite veneers, and a place where they encounter each other across closed boundaries with the common purpose of studying and understanding these interactions. If the hypothesis that many of the most intractable problems of diversity are related to fixation in a paranoid-schizoid position is valid, then the Group Relations conference, which emphasizes discovering one's unconscious participation in group projective and introjective processes through experience and interpretation of that experience, should theoretically provide an avenue out of this fixation toward a more depressive position.

Bion (1977) asserted that the object of psychoanalytic study is never known in itself. One must be willing to live with not knowing as one stretches toward truth with hypotheses informed by experience. This attitude and acceptance seem essential in the realm of diversity where each group's culture must relinquish the belief that it has the absolute truth and instead be open to the multiple, ambiguous, and paradoxical realities of group and intergroup experience. If the absence of adequate containers to receive and modify noxious projections is at the root of impasses in intergroup relations, then the Groups Relations model with its attention to boundaries and staff trained to receive projections should theoretically supply a suitable container for working on the dilemmas of diversity. Accordingly, when Group Relations conferences can attract individuals who have or will acquire significant power, authority, and willingness to exert leadership in the non-conference world, then conferences could make a meaningful attempt to untangle the knots of diversity. Coupled with others who are dedicated to act as diversity brokers and bridge differences using parallel social technologies, there is reason to have hope that our tendencies to denigrate the "other" from our paranoid-schizoid position could be addressed and transformed.

Despite the theoretical suitability of the Group Relations model, whether any Group Relations conference actually can make a constructive contribution to the study of diversity must remain problematical. One must factor into the equation that the Washington-Baltimore Affiliate (where "diversity" Group Relations conferences began), the A. K. Rice Institute, and other organizations in the Tavistock tradition are themselves a part of a group culture. We are therefore vulnerable to all the primitive and irrational processes of every other group.

On a micro-scale, the same skepticism leveled at the U. N. might be leveled at the A. K. Rice Institute. Where does it get its authority? Can it be trusted? Freud (1930) raised the question in *Civilization and Its Discontents* as to whether psychoanalysis had the proper vantage point or the authority to analyze the society of which it was a part. The assertion of authority from whatever source, no matter how authoritative, needs to be scrutinized for what might be split off, unsaid, or what might be said as part of a conscious or unconscious stratagem for political manipulation. This is the view of the deconstructionists (Derrida, 1984). No great writers, no theologians, no scientists, no philosophers, nor Group Relations consultants can stand outside of their own assertions, reflections, experiments, or revealed words about human affairs without being influenced by the subjective, vested interests of the self or of the groups being explicitly or implicitly represented.

In the typical Group Relations conference, as members' defenses fall away and boundaries between self and group begin to blur, the drive to dichotomize into "idealized me" and "denigrated not me" groups asserts itself as a step toward reestablishing identity. These groups almost invariably crystallize around visible or gross characteristics such as skin color, gender, and non-consultant status, providing an opportunity to learn about the underlying primitive forces that so often distort and confound relations between diverse groups. If we are going to do this work with integrity, we should be continually asking ourselves disturbing questions.

CASE EXAMPLES

In conference life, the paranoid-schizoid position becomes evident in the first encounters between the membership and the consulting staff. The physical and functional boundary that is present in the Director's opening creates a clear demarcation of "me" and "not me." This kind of split is further exacerbated when the consultant role often defies the expectations of those unfamiliar with the Group Relations experience. As consultants offer interpretations that speak to the blend of authority and diversity in the group's dynamic, there is anxiety that comes to exist in individual members. Each must determine where he or she is located in a configuration where the usual conventions of social interaction and psychological defenses may fail to provide security. Paranoid projections and schizoid detachment follow.

When a consultant speaks to the polarities that typically present themselves in the group, the paranoid-schizoid stance moves to include the intra-group relations. With a consultation such as, "The group continues to silence the voice of women in favor of the competition between two men who appear to be vying for leadership of the group," members attempt to find themselves in the interpretation. If members do not slip into their own schizoid place, they are likely to enter a collective paranoia with those who share an identity.

In one conference, two African-American men became involved in a passionate but protracted disagreement. A consultant, also an African-American male, provided an interpretation that, "The group appears content with once more using Black men to have a fight and hold the aggression

as if there is no fight or aggression anywhere else in the room.” The words of the consultant were seen as an intrusion into the process of the pair by the voices that were raised in the group. Further, the African-American men themselves viewed as “racist” the notion that Black men would be seen as aggressive rather than simply having a disagreement. For the remainder of the session, the group-as-a-whole focused on dismissing the interpretation and characterizing the input as imposition of external realities into the current context. The initial pair of Black men were joined by the other Black men at the conference and galvanized as a collective in a refusal to work or explore the possibility that they were used by the group. The other members, particularly those who were White, also acted to refute the interpretation, offering views such as, “I see no difference when Black men disagree than when any one from any other race disagrees. How could anyone say such a thing.”

In this instance, the “me”/“not me” split occurred along the member/consultant axis. The paranoid-schizoid position served to help the members preserve a sense of innocence and locate the source of denigration in the consultant. With the consultant working to hold these projections, the group is able to bind its anxiety in an illusory solidarity that collapses as quickly as it was created. Indeed, in a subsequent session, members began to own their “glee” that others were fighting so that they did not have to find their own voice in the process. Others were also able to follow by giving voice to their unspoken “fear” that the words could become a physical confrontation because of the identity of the men who were involved in the disagreement. With tearful emotion, one of the African-American men spoke of his weariness in having to hold his feelings because of how rapidly others termed his experience as anger. As members offered more of their perceptions and increased their acceptance in their participation in the dynamic, the depressive position emerged in the group and the learning became palpable.

In another conference, an African-American consulting staff was met with groups in the Institutional Event with names such as the Alternative Force, composed of all White members, and the Diversity Dialogue, which was lead by Blacks but was designed to be “inclusive.” Such groups were clear in their mission to provide a counterpoint to the skewed authority structure of the conference, which was alternately idealized and devalued as incompetent by the membership. The most telling evidence, however, was in a group that named itself “Three Straight White Males.” Given that the group was composed of three members that were either Black or gay as their professed primary identity, their use of the name spoke to the unconscious wish to use the construction of traditional White male authority as a foil to one they faced. With a blend of shame and sadness during the Conference Discussion and Application Groups, these members came to realize that their efforts to nullify the authority of the conference leadership through assuming this other identity served also to nullify the parts of themselves that they most valued. The more painful and powerful learning was the awareness that they may have been doing this all along their lives, but did not recognize the subtlety with which they allowed it to manifest in their lives.

THE DANGERS OF BEING COMPLICIT IN DENIGRATION: QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

Do we allow or even promote regression because it is in the service of the ego and learning of members? Or are we using iatrogenically regressed conference members to gratify our desire to experience ourselves as idealized in relation to a denigrated “other” group?

We often carefully compose our conference staffs so that they present an image of diversity to conference members. Are the tensions that arise from the staff diversity confronted and worked within the staff or are they projected into the members through “interpretations” of members’ work? It is not only the members of the conference who need to see themselves reflected in the images projected on the staff, but the consultant staff must be ready to see themselves as seen by the members (Kahn & Green, 2004).

We should recognize that if we are perceived as the corrupt, exploitative, deceitful, and manipulative parent, employer, or “good old boy” racist, it may not be simply because of transference or counter-transference, but also because we may in part be them. We are part of our society’s establishment and have for the most part not renounced our ancestors or made personal reparations for injustices visited on those “others” used as the objects of conscious and unconscious denigration (Sampson, 1993). Many of us enjoy a degree of privilege about which we can exercise a degree of denial, reducing any need to literally or metaphorically give away our accumulated goods derived from our advantages (McIntosh, 1999). To perform these acts of contrition might assuage our consciences but probably would not help conference members learn. Rather, we need to allow ourselves to be penetrated by what the members communicate, whether it seems to be about us or them, not throw it back in the form of counter-assaultive “interpretations.” To contain and process our experience before we reactively project it out involves trading the grandeur and detachment of the paranoid-schizoid position for the suffering and more meaningful insight of the depressive position. In the diversity conference context in particular, the consultant may be required to hold projections and tolerate a longer sense of here-and-now. The regressed member as the “other” may re-experience the denigration from another time and place in the “now” and need time to link it to the conference experience. When we do not do so, we help create casualties anew.

In our Tavistock connection, we have roots in the British Empire. This tradition is one that colonized much of the world, importing valuable materials and exporting through projective identification and armed coercion the unintegrated parts of the British character into the “primitive people” throughout the world. We need to ask ourselves how much we unconsciously identify with this tradition by holding conferences in order to export our shadow selves onto unsuspecting members of conferences. The generational, gender, factional, regional, and racial tensions within our organization periodically flare up and lead to causalities or permanent splits but are seldom worked, except perhaps indirectly through members of conferences. Are people of color in our organization recapitulating roles of an elite among the oppressed

that enabled colonial powers to rule? Are people from other cultures used to hold exotic and passionate aspects of our collective selves? Are gay and lesbian staff members used to be repositories of primitive sexual projections? And are those who are chosen for staff, regardless of apparent cultural differences, selected to conform to some absent standard of authority, "Whiteness," and Tavistock tradition that unconsciously prevails?

We also have roots in the American tradition that developed and espoused democratic institutions and equality, while at the same time developing and managing the dehumanizing institution of slavery. Senge (1991) and Argyris (1993) termed this process as a gap between the espoused theory and the theory in use. A reasonable hypothesis is that we are sometimes more invested in enlisting members to become our gifted children by marking them as work leaders or stars rather than pursuing our stated task. In doing so, we then create an outcome characterized by a conversion to the "order" and a form of intellectual enslavement rather than authentic learning. At a more pernicious level, we act to co-opt the "other" into our own unconscious paranoid and primitive processes. We ultimately run the risk of acting to perpetuate the dominant discourse through the faces of those offering interpretations seem to be accented by a different hue.

Gustafson and Cooper (1979) criticized the technique of the conference consultant as intrusive abandonment rather than collaborative work. Their criticism raises the question of whether we act to maneuver members into behaviors and expressions that conform to our projections. The fact that too often we do not follow up conference experience with meaningful application suggests that the intrusion and abandonment has other dimensions. As Miller (1985) suggested, members who come to a conference and learn to manage themselves in role are fine for the moment but without other support or intervention are being sold "a shirt that shrinks the first time it is laundered" (p. 393). The utility of the conference experience beyond the temporary institution is brought into question. By extension, the use of Group Relations conferences on diversity are perhaps more suspect, as it is the core of identity that are bought to study. It is unclear whether those of us who do this work have an alternative to well formed cultural processes that provide security for the member. It is in this respect that we provide a leaky container that encourages exploration of the unconscious but no containment for what fills the consciousness.

Do we use our psychoanalytic and Tavistock language as an exploratory scientific instrument to explore the frontiers of our conceptual understanding or do we use it like mysterious incantations to reassure us of our power and to mesmerize or dominate the minds of the listeners? Hostility of members becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy generated from our paranoid responses disguised in the form of interpretation of the behavior of the "other." We become justified in our behavior when members express contempt and assault our grandiosity, creating the conditions for helpful indoctrination into our own dominance discourse, one that has the guise of the study of authority. In many ways, we may be observing that the balance between the contained and the container that Bion described has shifted in the direction of the insti-

tutionalized container. If this position is true, the provocative genius of the pioneers of Group Relations work has been diluted in favor of stability, causing us to lose our vital creative edge. The result will be an institution that is moving toward greater detachment from meaning and, in Spengler's idiom, a declining civilization.

After more than a decade of AKRI conferences dedicated to the study of diversity, these questions and issues remain valid and require continued responsible reflection and exploration. If we are to provide good containers that can enable members to unveil to themselves and others the primitive paranoid processes at work under the defensive and polite veneers, it is incumbent on us not to be in the untenable position of "do as we say, not as we do." Miller (1985) stated that the role of the Group Relations consultant is only to intervene to enhance the learning of members. He contended that we may also intervene to enhance our own status and manipulate members toward some conscious or unconscious desire, whether it be a movement toward social reform in their organizations or to enlist them as allies in our own struggles within our organization (Kahn & Green, 2004). Miller strongly recommended that we always ask ourselves why we are making this intervention. This seems to be the leading edge for us in the work. It may also be the only way to be credible to ourselves and true containers for the study of diversity rather than another Tower of Babel.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

The Washington-Baltimore Affiliate of the A. K. Rice Institute and Howard University Counseling Service began collaborating on an annual Group Relations conference on diversity in 1989 to serve as a laboratory to test the relevance of the hypothesis advanced in this paper as well as develop new ones. Bion suggested that learning occurs when preconception is not mated with a "breast" and one is thrown into confusion and pain, which can then be converted into thought. The ideas developed in this paper are derivatives of literature review and our conference experiences to date. They do not represent conclusions as much as continued conceptions to be further tested and modified by new experiences. This chapter represents a weigh station in what we hope will be a long collaborative process utilizing the Group Relations conference as an experiential laboratory.

Though the use of "diversity" as a specific theme seems to have begun to ebb after a decade of study, the influence of the learning from diversity as a theme in Group Relations work remains prominent. As of this writing, the work appears to be morphing into new and ancient arenas of diversity, taking the form of conferences that explore interfaith relations, spirituality, chaos, and complexity. Some critics may argue that the use of diversity as well as any of the currently emerging themes serve as little more than a marketing tool to attract members to conferences that remained unchanged in their dynamics. A less cynical, more reflective, and longer view provides evidence that we have learned a bit more. The emphasis on diversity is perhaps transformative, as it continues to give us more precise ways to name and then learn

about the intersections of social identity and authority. In this respect, the study of diversity has become more than a mere exploration of psychological constructs manifested from the unconscious: it serves as a reflection in microcosm of the lived experiences of those who have learned with us at conferences. Through the depths of the depressive position emerges hope, however fleeting, that we can give authentic voice to the recognition that our authority is reflected in everyone we encounter. In this recognition, we begin to end our paranoid projection onto one another, we begin to end our denigration of the other, and we begin again to find the language of our common humanity lost with the fall of a mythic tower so long ago.

The Denigrated Other: Diversity and Group Relations

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