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Two Perspectives on a Trauma in a Training Group: The Systems-Centred Approach and the Theory of Incohesion: Part II

Susan P. Gantt and Earl Hopper

PART II. This paper continues from the previous issue. Part I described the two theories: the theory of living human systems and its systems-centred approach and the theory of incohesion. This part discusses a specific group and its trauma from the two perspectives.

Key words: systems-centred training, (ba) I:A|M, theory of incohesion, theory of living human systems, trauma, aggregation, massification, roles, basic assumptions

The Group and its Trauma

We will now present the empirical material of the verbatim descriptions of the trauma from the group members' perspective. The SCT training group had been working for two and a half days, and was in the last afternoon of a three-day experiential workshop on exploring roles. This group was composed of members at an intermediate level in SCT training. They had mastered the basics of developing and taking membership in an SCT group, including centering into themselves and their primary experience, using functional subgrouping to contain and explore group conflicts. The group members had competence in modifying the basic defences that SCT groups undo: the cognitive defences of anxiety, the somatic defences of tension, and the

discharge defences of depression and outrage that defend against the retaliatory impulse.

In SCT, centring relates to grounding into one's body in a way that connects a person to his or her primary apprehensive, sensory experience with an awareness of both self-experience and context. Working from one's centred experience provides an important platform for exploring the pull into old roles without enacting the role itself. The focus of the workshop was to explore old stereotyped and personalized roles as they were elicited in the group context. The group had been identifying the roles that were elicited for them in the group, and the triggers in the group that stimulated the emergence of these roles, learning about their phenomenology and their genetic origins, working to undo the original splits the old roles maintained, and learning to shift away from the role to discover the primary experience that the role blocked.

With one hour of 'small group' work remaining, the observer entered. The leader and the group were taken by surprise! The leader, Susan, recovered enough to orient the group to the plan that she and Earl had made for him to observe, and to tell the group that she had 'forgotten' to let them know about this. Not surprisingly, therefore, the interruption violated the structure, and simultaneously, the observer's behaviour violated the SCT norms of observing. These violations precipitated an 'authority issue' with the leader, the SCT term for this kind of negative transference. In fact, the group explored some of the paranoia and hatred toward the leadership.

When this subsided, Susan suggested to the group that they explore the impact of the unexpected interruption in the context of roles, which was the focus of the workshop, in particular by noticing what roles and experiences were stimulated by the leader's failing to prepare them for this intrusion by an unexpected observer. The group then explored the roles and role solutions that emerged in the group work following the disruption and failure in leadership.

What Happened from the Perspective of the Participants

Within a few weeks, Susan wrote to each of the participants asking them to write briefly about their memory of the group session:

I am talking with Earl Hopper about writing a description of the group session he observed that would include his perspective from his work on the fourth basic assumption and my perspective from SCT. I would very much like your help with this in terms of what you remember about the group and your experience of yourself and the group's work. So if you are willing, please email me what you remember of the meeting and what was significant for you in the session.

The group members obliged, and within a month of the session, they sent their material to Susan, which we include verbatim below. Although this material shows some diversity of views and themes, taken together it represents a collective group response to a traumatic event following a failure in leadership and the unexpected break in structure and norms.

The first member. I saw an elderly man come into the room [sic: referring to the unexpected observer, Earl]. I assumed that he was in the wrong place and on realizing this, would leave. As it became apparent that he was coming further into the room, I expected Susan or Tim (pseudonym) would address him, either ask where he was trying to find or ask him to leave the room. Tim was an advanced trainee who was working in a 'containing role' [sic: referring to a leadership training role in which a member works authentically to join and support subgroups in the service of the overall development of the group-as-a-whole instead of in the service of his or her personal learning or growth.] However, he came further into the room and I became increasingly surprised that neither Susan nor Tim appeared to be dealing with the interruption. I think that as he headed for a seat on the far side of the room and had some verbal exchange with Susan about where he should be, she announced that she had forgotten to tell the group that we would be having an observer.

It seemed extraordinary that having an observer could be forgotten and I don't think I really believed that this was what had happened. I felt really angry and assumed that Yvonne [sic: the workshop director and leader to the other training group in the adjoining room] had set this up. I thought she thought that as a (whole) group we had not dealt with the authority issue and had set up the interruption in order to provoke a reaction. I think one of the other members started talking in a furious fashion about some previous contact she had had with Earl, but I think I was probably constructing my own view of what was happening at the time.

My response to 'being set up' was one of defiance, thinking 'don't think you can make me do what you want me to.' This made me not want to verbalize my feeling about the leader (Yvonne).

The mystery man sat behind me and I couldn't see him. I realize now that I had no curiosity about who he was (I didn't know him). Perhaps also because he was out of my line of vision I could in some way 'wipe him out.' (I had used this expression about the member taking on the container role in a group on

the previous day. On that occasion I had been able to wipe him out by keeping him out of my line of vision).

It was rather more difficult to keep the mystery man out of my vision as I became gradually aware that he was making noises, and leaning forward on his chair, and intermittently I could see him in my peripheral vision. This aroused the thought that he was not conducting himself in a manner appropriate to an observer.

The group was disrupted by his entrance. It seemed that we had all been shocked and gone into our person role but gradually we were able to move back into the member role. There was strong support and agreement from the group that we should do this and it really helped. As we took up the member role, we were able to explore the experience. Finally I think the group felt satisfied that we had been able to return to the goal of the work, i.e. to explore roles.

The second member. I don't recall having spoken yet in this group when a man walked into the room. I remember having an impulse to get up and speak to him, but knowing I was not the leader, I looked to Susan. I then looked back at him and heard another member say Earl Hopper's name. I had not recognized him before this, even though I had met him. I also knew about a difficult personal meeting another member had had with Earl in another context and how difficult it had been.

Susan then said that he was coming to observe us, and I remember thinking how composed Susan looked, as she told us that she had forgotten to tell us. I also felt shocked and incredulous, but did not feel angry. I was aware of my care-taking impulse in relation to Susan.

The group now felt incredibly chaotic and raucous with all the attention shifted from the group and the 'hold' of the leader, to the outside of the group on to Earl. Like we had turned inside out. This was made easier by him eating a biscuit, as well as leaning forward into the group, as it seemed at times he was having difficulty hearing.

After some time of the group out-raging, I said from my container role, that we needed to vector our energy back across the boundary to the work we had started at the beginning of the session. I reminded the group that we had been begun again, to look at the fork between adaptive and maladaptive roles, and we needed to return to that using this to do so. I also asked the group if everyone was centered, and said that we needed to go inside of ourselves for our experience. I felt the group responded and there was some shift. Attention was still towards Earl, but it felt like the experience was more in the group and inside of us, than out of the group.

The group continued to explore their experience, with Earl and Susan as 'trigger' to go into role. We subgrouped more strongly now and as the energy came into the group, Susan became the target for the authority issue which had been triggered. This was worked with a bit, but time was a constraint also. It felt like I left the group with unfinished business.

I am still surprised that the group brought in surprises and learnings and satisfactions, as well as dissatisfactions, including myself. [sic: referring to

the usual SCT structure used in the last ten minutes of the group for reviewing the work of the group.]

The third member. What I remember is the door opening and thinking he's got the wrong room and in a minute Susan will say something. This was quickly followed by my feeling of shock as I recognized Earl Hopper and thinking surely he can't be coming into this group. The group sense of shock and disruption as he came in. Exploring our bewilderment and then anger in sub-groups. Knowing that my shock came partly from a previous encounter with Earl Hopper and trying to keep my focus on the present. Finding the eye contact very helpful, particularly with two members. Having to work hard at staying focused on our goal of exploring roles and not be drawn into watching Earl Hopper. Feeling angry with the fact that he ate biscuits, rocked on his chair, picked his nose. Thinking he hasn't got the faintest idea of how to be an observer – and saying so to Susan at the end, suggesting it was her responsibility to coach him in his role. I realised that this was a great opportunity to explore not going into my 'rabbit in the headlights role,' feeling slightly hysterical and laughing with others at the absurdity of the situation. Images of powerful people and statues (Boudicca sticks out) helped express our anger towards Susan. There was a sense of taking charge of ourselves and our goal and of Susan only being in the background, with the sub-grouping supporting us and the group supporting its members. There was a feeling at the end that we had sat in the fire and come out transformed and stronger.

The fourth member. After some deliberation, I discovered that I need more information in order to make a decision about participating in the research. I have found it difficult to reply to your e-mail, which concerns two issues. Firstly, when I thought about the group session and writing about my experiences, I realised I did not feel able to write about the group without the consent of everyone who participated. Secondly, I feel that unresolved feelings concerning Earl Hopper may be clouding my ability to make a decision about participating in the research. Although I learned a great deal from the last session, perhaps around recognising and containing strong and deep emotions triggered by the arrival of Earl Hopper, somehow this felt different to the work the group had previously been doing. I felt the impact of Earl Hopper in the last group session changed the course of the group's development and impacted on the work of the group. I was left with a feeling of dissatisfaction and frustration that our last session had been affected in this way. Perhaps more time would have resolved the issue, however due to time constraints the group work of unfinished business and ending was different. I have an inkling that these unresolved feelings, particularly towards Earl Hopper, are impacting on my ability to make an informed decision about participating in the research. I have an impulse to ignore these feelings and just participate (in a compliant role), however if I am able to use my new found awareness of roles, I would like to learn from my emotional knowledge and consider a different solution to the problem. Therefore, I would like to

know more about the research before agreeing to participate in order to make an informed decision. Finally, I would also like to mention that the three day training was a deeply powerful experience for me and it was a pleasure and a privilege to take part and to work with you and the others in the group [sic: subsequent permission was given for the inclusion of this material.]

The fifth member. When Earl entered the room I had mostly curiosity. I did become more self-conscious. However, it was more excitement than anxiety. Actually, I was excited to 'show off.' As I worked in the group, I started to perceive differences between myself and the group members who were having a more aversive response. I tried to stay empathic by thinking about how I could feel if 'triggered' by someone who came into the group unannounced.

As I write this, I realize that I became much more self-conscious, started to lose a systems perspective, went into my head, and became somewhat alienated from the group. I then had the impulse to: 1) join a subgroup even if I was not resonating with a subgroup; and 2) target the visitor whom I started to judge (e.g. What a jerk. Look at his posture. The guy is totally defensive. He thinks he is better than us, etc.) However, I am not sure of the chronology of events. Bottom line is that I did not have a strong reaction that I was aware of, judged myself, made inauthentic attempts to join a subgroup versus staying with the fact that I really was not too sure about what my experience was, then admitting to the subgroup that I was not really in it. All of this worked in opposition to my staying curious about my reaction and keeping a systems perspective in mind.

The sixth member. The work we did in the group exploring the roles we go into was extremely valuable and I feel it has shifted something in myself. In particular, I am amazed by the physical experiences and how functional subgrouping helped to build on it and contain it; the physical/apprehensive experience and the cognitive understanding of a role has really given me a sense of 'identity' of the roles (or at least one!) I have. This makes it much easier to understand it from all perspectives and begin to make changes. Because of the work we did in the first two days, it was possible to contain the energy in the group, during a very difficult moment when E. Hopper came into the room. I imagine it would have had quite a destructive effect on a non-SCT group! Again, I was amazed at how we remained focused, supported each other in the subgroups, kept the energy inside the group and had some fun too.

The seventh member. I remember the group had a slow beginning. The group took some time to work out the aims and goals of the group session. There was a distraction around the position of one member's chair. The group managed the turbulence and brought energy across the boundaries into the here and now with the aim of continuing the work of the group and the work of unfinished business. Goals included 'exploring triggers and the pull to role' and 'exploration of what is avoided and missed by going into role

and/or the cost of the role'. One subgroup was exploring the impulse to stay in role and hold onto anger and not wanting to give up the role.

The door opened and an unfamiliar person came into the room. This person, who I thought was lost, walked over to the tea and biscuits and began to eat. He walked through into the other room and then quickly returned, pulling up a chair and continuing to eat. He stayed for the duration of the rest of the group occasionally swinging on his chair.

The group leader told us she had forgotten to let the group know, or to ask the group, about the observer joining the group for the afternoon. Reactions that followed included shock, upset, disappointment, anger and some hysteria. The leader asked if the group wanted to continue to work on roles and use this incident to continue to explore responses and reactions in subgroups. I felt outraged. Both with the observer and the group leader. I felt cross, defiant, disempowered, childlike. The group had the work of integrating this new piece of information and new presence and re-establishing the boundaries. The group was, amazingly, gradually, slowly, able to explore and process the reactions and emotions, and I guess the retaliatory impulse, and continue the work of the group. This was made possible through subgrouping around experience and drawing attention back to the goals and making choices about how to continue working in the group. The group member in the container role and the group leader facilitated this process. Overall, the experience was hugely empowering and I learnt a great deal about the power of choice.

Discussion of the Group and its Trauma

From the SCT View: Susan

From the SCT view, the group's responses provide a rich description of the phase dynamics that were stimulated, starting with an authority phase response, moving to the intimacy phase dynamics and lastly, moving to recover work phase functioning.

First, anger, outrage and paranoia emerged. These were all part of the group's authority issue toward the group leader(s) (and the observer) and an inevitable response in any living human system to an unexpected break in structure and norms.

More importantly and relevant for the purposes of this article, the break in structure provoked a break in security and, thus, precipitated the familiar, personalized and stereotyped roles that members and groups use to organize in the face of anxiety and insecurity. This level of experience speaks to the underlying issues in the intimacy phase related to separation/individuation dynamics. It is here that Hopper's significant understanding of annihilation anxiety is most relevant. As one member said, he had to cope with the sense that the group was 'turned inside

out'. At this level the basic role adaptations re-emerge and can be explored, in particular the role adaptations that manage survival and annihilation anxiety. SCT sees this intimacy phase work as developing the containment to explore the actual experience of 'turned inside out' so that the experience can become more integrated and less encapsulated in a survival role. Agazarian (1994) has framed this as exploring the experience of falling apart. Hopper apprehends the annihilation anxiety that is aroused in the intimacy conflicts and further elaborates an understanding of the oscillating role defences that manage this level of experience. In this appreciation of the depth of the annihilation anxiety and the oscillation that manages it, I:A/M articulates a very important understanding of the underlying intimacy phase dynamics in living human systems that are invariably relevant in working with trauma.

It was a testament to the group's overall development that the group was in fact able to continue working in cooperation with the leader's direction. In their exploration, group members identified many of the pulls to old roles, with some recognition of how these roles helped them manage their personal responses, albeit stereotypically. Although the pull to the old roles signalled the degree of disruption in security that the group was experiencing, the group worked to re-establish its identity and security. Over time, members returned to their membership roles, and were able to centre into their personal experience and bring this into a subgroup in the service of exploration and development which enabled the group to re-establish a sense of structure and security. This was manifest in their becoming more cohesive, as seen in what Hopper (2003) has identified as three dimensions of cohesion, i.e., an increase in integration, solidarity and coherence, and, therefore, in the recovery of work group functioning.

Several members of the group identified their expectations that the leader would manage and remedy the unexpected interruption. It is interesting to note that this highlights that the traumatic event for the group was not only that the interruption and intrusion occurred, but also and maybe more importantly, that the leader failed to protect the group from this intrusion and then failed to extrude the intruder from the group. One member described this clearly: she expected that the leadership would manage the interruption. Her response to the violation

of her expectations by the leadership was then projected onto the senior authority figure (Yvonne), who was working with another group in an adjoining room. The paranoia surfaced:

It seemed extraordinary that having an observer could be forgotten, and I don't think I really believed that this was what had happened. I felt really angry and assumed that Yvonne (the workshop director and leader in the other training group) had set this up.

Another member recognized his care-taking impulse in response to the leader, but then focused on his own leadership behaviour in the group, with little sense of Susan's leadership. ('I was aware of my care-taking impulse in relation to Susan . . .')

Participants identified several possible roles, some of which were enacted, but others were discussed and explored. Explicitly named in the group's reflections were a defiant role, a paranoid role, a rescuer role, a 'rabbit in the headlights' role, a show-off role, an egoistic role, and a targeting role ('them versus us'). Other roles can be inferred from the group's behaviour and/or from their own write-ups, e.g. a taking charge role, the one-up role, an outraged role, etc. Each of the role pulls would have a personal history for the members who felt or enacted them and simultaneously represent an attempt at group adaptation to the trauma precipitated by failed dependency.

At the level of the group-as-a-whole, each of these roles was a potential group solution, offering a container for part of the group's reaction and attempting to remedy the break in security. Eventually, participants sought subgroup affiliations. Each of the subgroups also played a role in the group's work to stabilize and repair itself. The constellation of roles and subgroups then represented the group's adaptation to the traumatic event.

These roles represented a mixture of both the authority phase and the intimacy phase. As mentioned earlier, SCT expects that whenever a structure is broken, it is likely that the roles elicited will have a strong relationship with the authority phase and the authority issues. Certainly, this was evident in the group's reflections on the event. Many of the participants remembered an impulse to turn to the leader to manage and solve the problem of the intruder, only to discover that the leader had in fact introduced the problem. Several of these members were then able to explore the roles that became salient for them in relation to the

leader, which introduced a much greater complexity to the group and spawned the level of response related to the deeper issues of dependency and security that SCT identifies as characteristic of the intimacy phase.

SCT would expect that when dependency has failed, the earlier role solutions with strong roots to the attachment system dynamics would manifest in an attempt to stabilize the group. In fact, several members reported their sense of the group banding together and supporting each other, as seen in their insistence that this trauma would have been destructive to a 'non-SCT' group. This reflected the emergence of enchantment or what Hopper calls massification, in response to the annihilation anxiety associated with broken primal attachments. One member reported the impulse to disappear down the rabbit hole into herself and her body (a 'withdrawing role'), and another member to the role of 'being different' and recognizing that he did not introduce the difference as the basis for another functional subgroup. Both roles are related to avoidance or to what SCT terms the disenchantment roles in intimacy in which the early role solutions were toward premature separation, similar to what Hopper calls aggregation. In effect, at the intimacy level in which the main issues are those of early attachment and separation/individuation, the group produced the two predictable implicit subgroups, holding the complementary solutions, one of the members holding the disenchantment roles and one of the members with the pull to enchantment as the solution.

The focus in SCT is on re-establishing the group system that can support the exploration of the response to the break in security. Using functional subgrouping is especially important here. The stabilization through roles was much more likely to maintain survival at the expense of development. In contrast, stabilizing with functional subgrouping increases the potential for both survival and development. Linking to the formulations in the theory of Incohesion, the SCT method of functional subgrouping is used to provide a secure containment for exploring (through discriminating and integrating the experience) the annihilation anxiety that the role encapsulations and oscillations manage. Thus, with functional subgrouping, the oscillations can be organized in the service of development instead of defence and fixation.

Needless to say, the 'surprise' observer was challenging to the leader as well as to the group. Mostly, Susan managed this by holding the SCT structure and group norms for exploring. This enabled a 'good enough' group containment for the group to explore the responses to the break in structure and norms. Yet, in retrospect, there was additional work that would have been useful. The role solutions that the group was holding might have been reframed in a way that enabled the group to explore the two kinds of intimacy roles that the group was naming in two functional subgroups, i.e. those holding the enchantment roles being explored in one subgroup, and then in turn, those holding the disenchantment roles being explored in the other subgroup. This would have maximized the opportunity for repair to the group-as-a-whole, and, isomorphically, a repair in each member. The group-as-a-whole might have been able to contain what Earl calls the intra-psychic or intra-personal oscillation from crustacean to amoeboid, and the inter-psychic or inter-personal oscillation between aggregation and massification, until the information contained in the two sides of the oscillation could be explored and integrated, first in the security of functional subgrouping, and then in the group-as-a-whole. Functional subgrouping would be thus used to shift the group from an enactment to an exploration, thus enabling group security to be re-established and simultaneously potentiating the developmental process of discriminating and integrating the information. From an SCT perspective, this example of group trauma from failed dependency provoked roles with roots to basic attachment styles related to the intimacy phase dynamics characterized by separation/individuation issues. It is here that Earl's understanding of the annihilation anxiety managed by these roles is in fact enormously useful in deepening the way in which SCT understands the intimacy phase of system development and its defining processes and developmental challenges.

The (ba) I:A/M View: Earl

The dynamics of what SCT calls the authority phase are associated with unconscious Oedipal dynamics. In this connection Earl was experienced as a paternal, sexual, phallic intruder into the individual children of the 'mother' group and its 'maternal leader,' the maternal body of the group and of its

maternal leader, and into the 'mind' of the group and its maternal leader. Mother turned a blind eye, and neglected to protect her children, who were exposed to a primal scene experience in which they had to cope with their sudden awareness that their leaders, Susan and Yvonne, had relationships with Earl that allowed this to have been arranged 'behind the scenes'. Thus, Susan and Yvonne were perceived as having colluded with the perpetration of trauma.

The dynamics of what SCT calls the intimacy phase are associated with the unconscious dynamics of separation and individuation, which can be conceptualized in terms of traumatogenic processes and traumatic experience. Here we are less concerned with Oedipus and more concerned with the mysteries of the Sphinx and the myth of Osiris. In this connection the empirical material illustrates, in order: intrusion and broken boundaries; failed dependency; traumatic experience; the fear of annihilation and its vicissitudes involving psychic fission and fragmentation oscillating with psychic fusion and confusion; aggregation oscillating with massification; the development of roles associated with aggregation and massification; role suction; personifications of roles by people who have developed crustacean and/or amoeboid defensive personality organization; and patterns of aggressive feelings and aggression. Personification of aggregation was seen first in crustacean/lone wolf functioning, for example, in one member's reflection: 'I became much more self-conscious, started to lose a systems perspective, went into my head, and became somewhat alienated from the group'. The personification of massification was then seen in amoeboid/morale boosting functioning, for example, in another member's singing the praises of SCT and the skills that it provided.

The projection of extreme incompetence onto the observer (Earl), who was defined as being outside the SCT framework, was essential to the development and maintenance of the massification process. He broke SCT rules about how to conduct an observation. To say the least, he was unwelcome! He was perceived as ill-mannered, with dirty habits, and as self-soothing – if not masturbatory (rocking in his chair). In other words, he was denigrated, virtually demonized and psychologically excluded from the group. This was not only a matter of a paternal and phallic intrusion, but also a matter of Earl's having interrupted illusions of enchantment.

Individual participants who showed any sign of not falling in with the development of an exceedingly positive self-image of the group were also scapegoated. Not only was it essential to impress the 'observer' with a marvellous 'scenario,' it was also necessary for the group to see itself in this way. Obviously scapegoating is essential to the development and maintenance of the massification process. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the ways that groups perceive scapegoats in terms of their relationships to the leader of the group, which are often based on the group's needs and wishes to protect the leader from their own aggression.

Clearly the group worked very hard in order to recover their work group functioning, which they did achieve by the end of the session. Nonetheless, this recovery was also associated with massification processes. In the same way that all basic assumptions can be functional for particular kinds of work group activity (e.g., during times of war, the fight/flight basic assumption serves work group processes that are required by the military and by a citizenry mobilized for war), massification serves the development and maintenance of morale.

This empirical material illustrates how important it is to focus on unconscious meanings of communications. Without wishing to be self-protective, I would suggest that in reality I was not all that horrible, and Susan and Yvonne not all that marvellous. After all, Susan and Yvonne's 'oversight' was 'forgotten' fairly quickly. Actually, I would suggest that it was encapsulated. It is also well worth considering what information about my counter-transference might tell us about what I was witnessing and what might have been projected onto me, but this, too, is beyond the scope of the present paper.

Concluding Discussion

Susan. In summary, Hopper's understanding of the oscillating role defences that manage the annihilation anxiety is extremely useful for SCT. In the intimacy phase work so essential in working with trauma, SCT emphasizes containing the pull to the role oscillation in functional subgrouping. As each set of roles is contained and then explored in turn, the information encapsulated by the role and related to the annihilation anxiety therein can

be discriminated and integrated, thereby potentiating system development rather than the fixation of oscillation (Agazarian, 2003).

SCT emphasizes system dynamics, while basic assumption theory emphasizes the psychodynamics, or to put this another way, SCT begins with the dynamics of the most comprehensive system and its subsystems, and basic assumption theory begins with psychodynamics of the members of the system. Of course, Hopper's version of basic assumption theory conceptualizes persons as members of the system, and SCT fully recognizes that members of systems have psychodynamics. Yet, rather than focusing on psychodynamics, SCT conceptualizes system dynamics as isomorphic at all levels of a system, including the person. SCT focuses on building the system that can explore whatever dynamics emerge, so the information/energy can be discriminated and integrated in the service of system development at all system levels.

In a review of Hopper's book written a year before this group event occurred, Agazarian (2003: 4) compared the two approaches:

Hopper's Theory of Incohesion complements our [SCT] thinking . . . [by offering] . . . a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the phase of intimacy. [However] . . . we explain the splitting that occurs in the Intimacy Phase in terms of the vicissitudes of discrimination and integration in the process of separation and individuation: attributing separation to discriminating differences in the apparently similar and individuation to discriminating similarities in the apparently different. The deeper, psychodynamic experiences of alienation we explain in terms of a barrier experience, in which there is a primary split between good and bad which makes it impossible to discriminate the good in the bad or the bad in the good. Thus the emergence of the roles are characterized either by alienation and blind despair or by merging and blind hope. Where Hopper is importantly different in his approach is that both his thinking and his interpretation of group and individual dynamics are deeply related to the personal and social unconscious, whereas ours are related to the development of apprehensive containment that enables the individual and the group to discover titrated layers of unconscious material.

One other difference seems relevant to note in this context. At the personal level, in writing this paper, I have found myself wanting to protect the group from pathologizing interpretations of their responses to this traumatic event, especially in so far as

such pathologizing interpretations may be experienced as another intrusive traumatic event. Yet I do not think my impulse is purely personal in that it is here that the differences in the emphasis on psychodynamics and system dynamics are most pronounced, and though a detailed exploration of the differences is beyond the scope of this paper, it is perhaps most relevant to note these differences in terms of working with trauma. From a systems perspective, framing human dynamics in terms of psychopathology risks increasing the personalization of the group responses in a way that closes the boundaries to exploration, rather than opening them. Looking at a system solution in context detoxifies the understanding of the group solutions and the personalized solutions, and creates a system for exploration that enhances the potential for development.

Earl. This material illustrates how the basic assumption of incohesion is more relevant to the understanding of the fear of annihilation than it is to Oedipal anxieties. Failed dependency is not only a matter of an incestuous event coupled with the sense that mother has turned a blind eye, but also a matter of the experiences of profound helplessness and fear of annihilation that follow from actual damage, abandonment and loss, which are the main ingredients of a traumatogenic process which involves ruptures in the safety shield. Also, mergers of massification are not about removing the father as much as they are about becoming part of all that is maternal, although this is obviously a matter of emphasis.

The responses to the traumatized by the community and significant others are very important in determining the severity of both short and longer-term sequelae of traumatic experience. Susan's behaviour, and, in turn, the behaviour of most of the individuals in the group, facilitated their returning to work group functioning. Their behaviour reflected the skills that they had developed in the context of SCT. However, I believe that I would have achieved the same outcomes, but on the basis of clarification, holding, containing and ultimately interpretation of the unconscious aspects of traumatic experience. I hope that within a therapy or a training group these experiences would be metabolized in a way that enabled the participants in the group to feel, think and behave in more 'mature' ways, not only in the group but also in other contexts.

I take issue with Susan's belief that basic assumption theory and interventions based on it serve to 'pathologize' a particular set of group dynamics and its personification by particular individuals, unless she believes that anxiety and burdensome defences against it mean 'pathology'. After all, Oedipal anxieties among adults in work situations do indicate psychopathology, as do psychotic anxieties, such as the fear of annihilation. Nonetheless, these relationships are 'natural'. There can hardly be any doubt that under certain circumstances most people experience Oedipal anxieties and psychotic anxieties. Moreover, some people experience such anxieties more intensely and more regularly than do others, and do so at inappropriate times and places. Help with these anxieties is available through well-timed and empathic transference interpretations. After all, to what in the world does 'trauma' refer, if not to 'pathology'? And to whom does SCT offer 'therapy', if not to people who say that they need help with their suffering and problems? Nonetheless, I do not think of groups or systems as pathological. For example, when I work as a consultant to organizations to which I refer metaphorically as 'traumatized', 'wounded', or 'broken', and less metaphorically as 'disrupted', because anxiety in these organizations is rife among their personnel, and because I can trace these anxieties to various characteristics of the organizational systems, I think of these organizations as 'pathogenic', in that they have become structured in ways that cause their personnel to feel anxious, which is a natural, normal and healthy response to danger.

I often work in organizations and in countries in which high levels of anxiety are statistically normal. Thus, so, too, is (ba) I: A/M. This basic assumption is functional in that it seems to be necessary for psychic survival. Without (ba) I: A/M groups might fall apart much more quickly and totally than they so often do (which is also the case with respect to the other three basic assumptions of dependency, fight/flight and pairing). Of course, group psychotherapy, or rather psychotherapy for people in groups, differs from working with groups and other kinds of social systems for the purposes of training or helping to clarify matters with a view to changing the system itself. However, in working as a group analyst and as a consultant, I have experienced some amazingly hopeful and creative attempts to make use of traumatic experience and to improve matters.

In Conclusion

This kind of dialogue is an important step in the cross-fertilization that is essential in using diverse theoretical understandings to enrich clinical practice. We both share a strong commitment to theory as being essential in guiding practice. The two approaches described here are quite compatible and complementary. More specifically, the focus of the theory of incohesion and Hopper's depth of understanding of the annihilation anxiety that trauma arouses is a significant contribution that we have used to amplify and deepen the SCT understanding of the intimacy phase dynamics essential in any traumatic event.

Yet, the differences in the two approaches are important. They raise many issues and questions about the study and treatment of trauma, a more detailed exploration of which would be useful in the development of theory and clinical technique.

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