



FROM THE DIRECTOR

Large Group Takes a New Step at the SCTRI Conference

At our annual SCT Conference, we end the day with a large group meeting open to the whole Conference membership using the systems-centered method of functional subgrouping. (Group members implement functional subgrouping with each member saying "anyone else" when they have finished speaking, so that they can be joined by other members who can respond to and build on the heart of their message.) Each year the large group has developed more and more capacity for exploring its differences. Not surprisingly, large groups do develop, just like small groups!

At our 2008 Conference, the large group once again turned to the difficult subject of race, and developed a new capacity for this exploration.

This work started with one member introducing the issue of what it was like to be one of two African American members in a large group of 115. In SCT, the subgroup challenge is to join the member and not leave any member carrying "the voice of the group" alone. This time, as the subgroup emerged, exploring race took a new turn. Rather than exploring prejudice which the large group had done before, the group explored their "assumptions" about race and other differences that served as a barrier to relating: differences in color, accent, etc.

One member joined the subgroup identifying himself as a Catholic priest and voicing his assumption that people would see him differently when they knew he was a priest. Another member talked of his accent, and the assumptions he made of being stereotyped, when people asked him where he was from. Still another member joined with his assumption that others respond to a partial paralysis in his face but do not mention it to him. As the subgroup worked, members checked with group members to see if their assumptions were true. This marked a shift to one-on-one work that was possible in the supportive group climate. This work used the SCT technique for identifying assumptive "mind reads" and then checking them directly with those whose mind they are "reading." This led to a greater understanding of what the reality was. For example, several members acknowledged that knowing another member was a Catholic priest invoked many reactions in them. Others acknowledged that they were indeed distracted by their curiosity (and for some, prejudice) of foreign accents. Many members checked out their thoughts about the difficulties that occurred around race. Some noted that race was not as big a factor in England though reactions to class were stronger there.

The work was compelling and continued through the week, with several members saying that they usually did not come to large group but this work and the promise it held drew them back.

The last day members acknowledged their identities in the larger world that they felt others made assumptions about or stereotyped. Toward the end, the group recognized that the group energy had dwindled as we did this and we were no longer subgrouping in the here-and-now experience with our emotional energy. This was a good example of when subgrouping fails and does not have

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emotional energy in it. Similarly in this same group, the group recognized that talking about the idea of white privilege was a different pathway than exploring the actual experience or behaviors in the here-and-now that we label as white privilege. The group ended with some dissatisfaction that we had not been able to go further. At the same time, there was enormous satisfaction that we had taken a new step together in learning to explore the challenges of stereotyping and racism with each other.

-Susan Gantt

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Member,

What you hold in your hands lies somewhere between a newsletter and a journal. As the Newsletter team has integrated your feedback and functionally sub-grouped around our vision for the Newsletter, we have discovered two distinct goals. The first is to create a forum in which members can share their discoveries and cutting edge thinking about how they are integrating the Theory of Living Human Systems into their professional practice and in their lives. The second is to keep the membership informed about how the various Action Groups are progressing and to build our community by sharing important news and events about our members. In keeping with this vision, the first half of this Newsletter contains Yvonne Agazarian's "Emerging Theory" section and a fascinating collection of articles on the "Theory, Research and Applications" of the Theory of Living Human Systems. This half of the Newsletter is more than a newsletter and is directed both to the membership and to the general public. The second half is directed more exclusively to the membership and contains Reports and Updates from all of the Action Groups as well as a new section called "Letters to the Editor" and the "Members Forum" in which members can celebrate their accomplishments, make community announcements and share important events in the life of our community. After much reflection and subgrouping, we decided that the "Thumbnail Sketches" section was no longer coherent with the vision that is emerging for the Newsletter.

Here are some of the highlights that you have to look forward to! In Yvonne Agazarian's section on "Emerging Theory," you will find an article called "Some New and Some Old Perspective on Theory." In this article she both gives a concise review of the Theory of Living Human Systems and illuminates some of the leading edges of her thinking, particularly around the concept of "roles" and the relationship between the person and the group. In the next section, "Theory, Research and Application" our members have created a rich offering of the variety of ways that they are integrating and applying SCT. In these articles, one can clearly sense how we all are maturing in our understanding and application of the Theory of Living Human Systems. The section begins with a fascinating piece by Roelof Langman on "Using the Force Field to Support Personal Development" in the Authority Issue Group. This is followed by Katarina

Billman's intriguing and moving article about an experience she and her children had "Subgrouping in the Slums" of Kenya. After this, there is an article called "Embeddedness, Reflection, Mindfulness and the Unthought Known" in which I have integrated some of the insights from David Wallin's important new book "Attachment in Psychotherapy" with SCT. Then you will find Bonnie Macbride's article on the similarities and differences between Susan Johnson's "Emotionally Focused Therapy" and SCT. In this article, Bonnie compares and contrasts these two important approaches with great clarity. Finally, John Straznickas has written a creative reframing of how to understand the exchange of energy and information between the "green stuff" or universal energy, the person, the member, subgroup and group-as-a-whole systems, and the energy of the context that they are embedded within. All in all, I think that you will find yourself deeply stimulated and intrigued by these articles. I know that I was!

In the rest of the Newsletter, you will find the usual reports from the Action Groups the Members Forum and the new Letters to the Editor. These sections all reflect an organization which is vibrant and growing. As SCTRI continues to mature and emerge, there is a lot that we have to be proud of!

Finally, I want to thank the Newsletter team for all of the hard work that each of them has put into this issue. Systems-Centered News could not have come into being without the participation and input of Michael Silverstein, Verena Murphy, Bettie Banks, Yvonne Agazarian, Kathy Lum and especially Jan Vadell. Bravo!

I wish you all the very best in every aspect of your lives and hope that you are all thriving, happy and healthy.

*-Michael Robbins
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EMERGING THEORY BY YVONNE AGAZARIAN

SOME NEW AND SOME OLD PERSPECTIVE ON THEORY

As therapists, before we used the Theory of Living Human Systems (TLHS), we used psychodynamic understanding for people, and group dynamics for groups: two incompatible sets of dynamics and two incompatible languages! TLHS solved this problem by introducing a common language for both individuals and groups. It is for this reason that TLHS has such an important place in the training of systems-centered practitioners.

In this article I am first reminding us of the basic constructs of the theory, and then, thanks to all the work in the theory seminars this semester, introducing our recent understandings of the relationship between the person and the group. The Theory of Living Human Systems (TLHS) defines a hierarchy of isomorphic systems that are energy-organizing, goal-directed and self-correcting (Agazarian, 1997). The next few paragraphs remind of us of what these words mean.

Isomorphy

Von Bertalanffy (1968) defined isomorphy as similarity in structure and function. TLHS adds that systems are similar in structure and function and different in different contexts.

A good illustration of isomorphy is a set of nesting Russian dolls. Each doll has a similar structure: They look alike. Each has a similar function: To nest. And, according to where they are in the hierarchy, each exists in a different context - each doll exists in the context of the doll above them, and is the context for the doll below them. TLHS claims that understanding any one system requires thinking about context, and how it is influenced by the one below it and how it influences the one above it.

Thanks to the idea of isomorphy we become able to generalize from one system to another, from the smallest system in the hierarchy to the largest, and back again. This opens the door to recognizing that when one learns something new about

the way systems discriminate and integrate differences, or about how the permeability of the boundaries of system structure are influenced, we have learnt something new that will apply to all systems. For example we can observe the similarities between individuals and groups and organizations, and we can also discover how their structure and function changes as the context changes.

Structure

Structure is what brings a system into existence. What gives a system structure in space and time are its boundaries. When boundaries are permeable, exchanges of energy can cross between the system and its context. This opens the door to discovering how to reduce the restraining forces at the boundary so that the boundaries can be appropriately permeable. In SCT, this is done by using the hierarchy of defense modification that then releases the inherent drive towards the goals of system survival, development, and transformation.

Function

Function is how a system does what it does to survive, develop and transform. Living human systems survive, develop and transform by discriminating and integrating differences in the flow and organization of energy.

Hierarchy

When we think hierarchy we think that every living human system exists in the environment of the system above it and is the environment for the system below it. Thus understanding systems requires thinking about them in threes. The importance of this idea is developed under the heading "systems come in threes" which comes after the paragraphs discussing systems as energy-organizing, goal-oriented and self-correcting.

Systems Are Energy-Organizing

Energy and information are organized through the process of discriminating and integrating differences. In TLHS energy is equated with information. In other words,

energy = information and is formulated as E/I. This equation is borrowed from Miller's introduction to *Living Systems* (1978). The formula E/I makes it possible to think of how energy crosses system boundaries in the form of communications. We can also think about how communications are organized inside the boundaries so that the information can be used to reach system goals.

Systems Are Goal-Directed

The Primary System Goals of all systems are to survive, develop and transform from simpler to more complex. The Secondary System goals are social goals, the goals that we define for ourselves at play, at work and at home. When primary and secondary goals are in conflict, primary goals take precedence over secondary goals. Bion (1959) gave a good example of this with his Basic Assumptions which assume that the goals of dependency, flight/fight and pairing conflict with the goals of work.

Systems Are Self-Correcting

What drives a system towards its goals is the E/I that it organizes. TLHS calls this its driving force. Restraining forces are those organizations of E/I that oppose the system's movement towards the goal. SCT owes a great debt to Lewin (1951) for his construct of the force field which allows us to see, not only where the system is in relationship to its goal, but also to determine whether it is moving towards its stated goal (like Bion's "work") or whether it is moving towards a different goal (like Bion's "dependency, flight/fight or pairing assumptions"). Systems self-correct by systematically reducing the restraining forces that are inhibiting the systems movement towards the goal, and thus releasing the system drive.

Systems Come in Threes

Because all systems exist in the context of the system above and are the context for the system below it, TLHS defines all systems as sets of three. A good visual for this is to think of a sphere containing a smaller sphere which in turn contains a still smaller sphere, three concentric circles with a center, a middle and a containing outer circle. Applied to systems-centered therapy, these three spheres represent the group, which contains its members, who contain their persons. As members interact, both their person system and the group system are influenced, and the character of the group-as-a-whole changes. For example, a group looks different when its members are in flight behavior from how it looks when its members are in fight.

Person System with the Goal of Survival

The Person system is in the center of the three spheres. It functions as the source of system energy, the life force that flows throughout the hierarchy. E/I fuels not only the individual system, but also flows between all systems in the hierarchy. How it does this is the new contribution to our theory; as we will see later, the system roles that develop in the middle system of the person, cross from one middle system to another throughout the system hierarchy.

Member System with the Goal of Development

The middle member system is the organizing system that discriminates and integrates the energy (E/I). The middle system has a special place in systems-centered thinking because it shares its boundaries with both the center system and the outer system. For example, in consulting to an organization, changes in middle management that do cross the boundaries to both top management and the grass roots are more likely to change the organization than working first, either with upper management or the grass roots.

It is in the middle system that the discrimination and integration of E/I occurs. The outcome is the development of self-contained, isomorphic sub-systems that we call roles, which we talk more about under the heading "how subsystem roles develop."

System-as-a-Whole with the Goal of Transformation

The system-as-a-whole reaches the goal of transformation by integrating the interactions between the subsystems (roles). It is the organization of system role interactions that give the system its character. Transformations can serve as driving or restraining in our person systems and in our member systems. For example, our transformations can reflect interactions between insecure or secure sets of roles. In insecure roles, people's characteristic presence is different from how they appear when they are reflecting secure roles.

How System Roles Develop

As information and energy flows between the system and its environment, inputs that are similar tend to cluster together and inputs that are different separate to form new clusters. Thus person system energy is discriminated and integrated into clusters which in turn develop into subsystems that we call "roles."

A human illustration is the flow of energy-information between the infant and its mother. The infant integrates what is similar enough and rejects what is too different. In other words, certain communications between mother and child are driving forces in relationship to the goal of survival and certain other responses are restraining forces. As the complexity of these interactions develops, the infant develops clusters of responses to the communications which are established in the middle system. These are role clusters, which develop into subsystem roles.

Theoretically, as role clusters develop into roles, the roles have the potential for crossing the boundaries into the next system in the hierarchy and becoming members in another context: the "person" becomes a "member" of a group (a hierarchy of three.) As members of SCT groups know, this transition is challenging as it requires recognizing that personal awareness is different from member awareness, and requires becoming attuned to taking up their member roles so that they contribute to the goals of the "group" (the new context) without losing themselves: in other words, to take up "citizenship." This is a developmental transition from being person-centered (a member of the person system) to becoming systems-centered (a member of the context).

Now for another mental gymnastic. When we think about the hierarchy (see the diagram at the end of this article) we can

come to understand that each system in the hierarchy plays a role for itself in its own context, and also has a role as a member of the next context. This allows us to keep in mind the relationship between every system and its position in a hierarchy.

Which hierarchy one observes depends upon one's interests. If we take a psychotherapy hierarchy, we can say that the patient is a member of a therapy group, the therapy group is a member of a clinic, a clinic is a member of a hospital, a hospital is a member of the health system, and so on. This thinking generalizes to family and couples therapists, so that they can keep in mind their clients' contexts: their extended families and their philogeny and useful to change agents in managing their change interventions within the context of the different departments and departmental goals in the organization. In sum, TLHS provides a way of tracing the equivalence of structure and function for any defined hierarchy, thus enabling us to understand the influences that every system has from above and below.

Sequence of Spheres

Viewing this from the frame of isomorphy, everything said so far applies to every system in the hierarchy. The next step is to trace the route by which the system energy (E/I) is transferred in the roles that move up and down the hierarchy.

The person system role crosses the boundary into the member system's middle circle, where, in interaction with other roles, it contributes to the development of the member system. This same process occurs as the member system role crosses into the group thus contributing to the development of the group-system-as-a-whole. In other word, role clusters develop in the group as group members interact, their interactions develop group norms, and the group character develops as the norms develop. This is how the group transforms.

Subgrouping

Role clusters in groups represent the implicit subgrouping that occurs in every group. All members, in all groups, spontaneously come together around similarities and split away from differences. If this spontaneous subgrouping competes with the goals of leadership, it is easy to give it a bad name. Yalom (1995) for example sees subgroups as a pernicious force, often leading to negative outcomes and a stunting of group development. This is true when one observes subgrouping around stereotypes and is certainly true when one subgroup scapegoats the other, as it does when the group splits into stereotype subgroups like young and old, men and women, black and white, friend and foe, etc. It is in recognizing that subgroups result from spontaneous member interactions that it became clear that subgroups qualified as systems, some of which were driving forces in relationship to the necessary discrimination and integrations for group development, and some of which were restraining forces. It is the splits between different subgroups that the methods of functional subgrouping were designed to undo. Subgrouping becomes a very different phenomenon if one can structure it to be a driving force towards integration of similarities and differences. This is what Functional Subgrouping was designed to do.

By developing Functional Subgrouping, a new system was introduced: the subgroup system which bridged between member and group. Earlier in our work, some of you may remember that the "three" systems were; member, subgroup

and group-as-a-whole. This left the relationship between the person system and the member somewhat ambiguous. By recognizing that subgroups are a spontaneous group phenomenon, and that functional subgrouping is specific to systems-centered groups, I was able to re-conceptualize the system of three (person-member-group) to generalize to all groups.

SCT leaders explicitly train their members to subgroup. Probably all leaders implicitly train their members to fill the roles that will serve as driving forces. But driving forces in one group may be a restraining force in another. For example, the goal of a psychoanalytic group is to make the unconscious conscious. Thus roles that are appropriate to a cognitive behavioral group, in which methods of cognitive analysis move the group along the path to its goal, would be a restraining force in an analytic group where free-association is the driving force. Similarly in an interpersonal group, following the leader in the process of putting pressure on a single member to change would defeat the purpose of a systems-centered group where the major driving force is to explicitly subgroup functionally without the leader so that information can be discriminated and integrated by the subgroup members themselves.

Functional Subgrouping

In the chapter I wrote about "discovering subgroups" (Agazarian, 2006) I talk about suddenly hearing two sets of group voices, one, the subgroup of two therapists, doing their best to help the patients with their jealousy, while the other was the subgroup of patients who were sharing the delight of having to squash close together to make room for another, and talking about their yearning for closeness that did not exist for them when they went home alone after the group. The patients could hear each other, but had no energy for the therapists' intervention, while the "therapeutic" goal of the therapists made it impossible for them to hear the voice of the patients.

Understanding that members subgroup by coming together around similarities, made it possible to develop a method which would deliberately increase the discrimination and integration that, theoretically, is the most potent dynamic in development and transformation for both individuals and groups. This insight led to the development of the method of functional subgrouping. By requiring members to say "anyone else" when they finish speaking, and requiring the responding member to join the heart of the first member's message, subgroups came together on similarities, rather than separating around differences.

Functional subgrouping introduces a new conflict resolution method. As each subgroup explores its similarities it comes to recognize and integrate differences in what was apparently similar in its own subgroup, so each subgroup comes to recognize similarities in what was apparently different in the other subgroup and, as both similarities and differences are integrated, and at that point a transformation takes place in the system-as-a-whole.

Summary

All systems in the hierarchy are isomorphic: similar in structure and function and different in different contexts. By definition, all systems come in threes: the person system that is source of energy, the member system which imports energy from the person system, and the system as a whole which imports the

energy of the member system. Every system has three subsystems: 1. A central circle of survival energy, defined as energy = information (E/I), 2. A middle circle of developmental potential through the discrimination and integration of E/I, which results in subsystems that we call roles, and 3. An outer circle that contain the different transformations as these roles interact.

Transactions of energy-information across the boundaries of the systems in the hierarchy occur as the middle circle roles of each system cross the boundary into the system above it. Each system has the potential for sending and receiving roles that serve as driving or restraining forces. Whether they are a driving or restraining force will depend on whether the role has boundaries permeable to the new context. Crossing the boundary from one system to another depends upon the role directing energy to the goal of the new system context. When role imports fail in this transition, the imported role has boundaries still permeable to the system that it left, but impermeable to the new system it has joined. As each role develops in its new context, so the changes transfer, not only to the new system, but also as a change influence in its home system. It is thus energy transfers up and down the hierarchy. Functional subgrouping introduces a method for increasing the appropriate permeability of system boundaries to the discriminations and integrations of information.

Awareness of subgrouping is not necessarily useful to most groups leaders. However, applying the system perspective in understanding the relationships between the person and member and group may well be. For SCT leaders, developing functional subgroups is both a necessary (and sufficient!) variable if they

are to develop a SCT group. It becomes a mere mechanic unless there is the understanding of the theory behind it. Functional subgrouping increases the probability that the discrimination and integration of energy/information potentiates positive transformations in the person, the member and the group.

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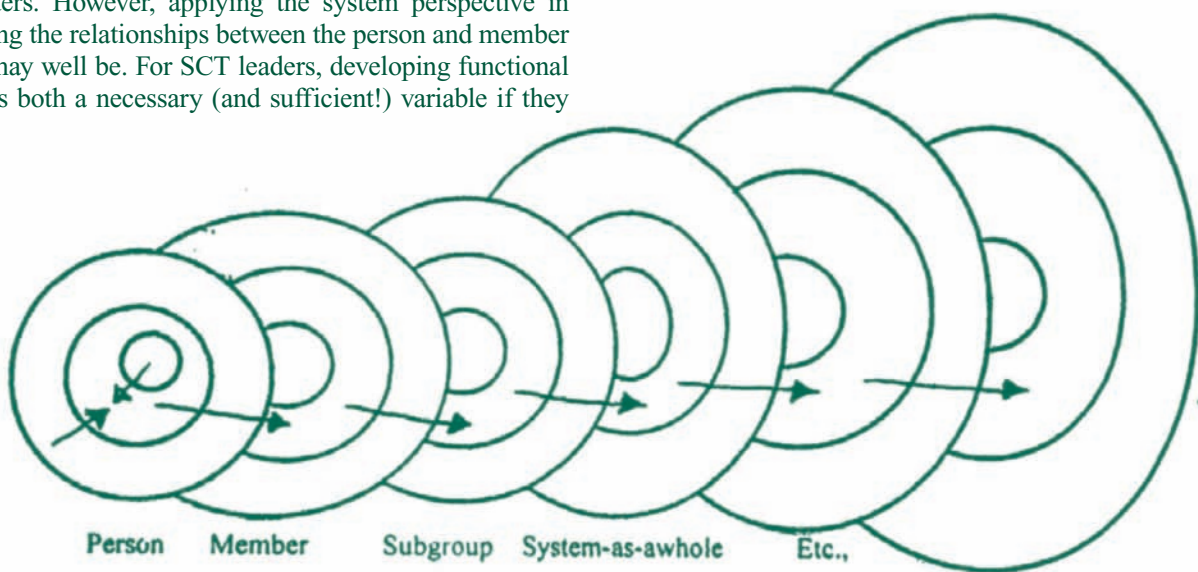
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CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDITS (CE'S) FOR SCT TRAINING

SCTRI is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists and offers CE's for psychologists at the Annual Conference and at Core Curriculum training events (Skills, Mentor and Authority Issue training groups). We also seek CE's on a local basis for social workers, mental health counselors, and marriage and family therapists in the area in which the Annual Conference is held. Trainers may also provide CE's for psychologists for training events they lead.

Certificates of attendance can also be obtained for the Annual Conference and Core Curriculum trainings and through individual trainers, with the member submitting these to their professional organization for possible acceptance as CE's.

SCTRI is interested in providing CE's for other professions if members are willing to provide the time, energy, and resources (emergent energy) to obtain provider status for offering such credits. If you are interested in further information about obtaining CE's, please contact Dick Ganley, CE Group Liaison, at dickganley@aol.com or 610-664-5730.

THEORY, RESEARCH AND APPLICATION

USING THE FORCE FIELD TO SUPPORT PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Many SCT groups use the “force field” model as an instrument for data collection to support their development as a system. In field theory, the force field captures the balance of forces that determines the state of a system at a given time (Lewin, 1943). Yvonne Agazarian introduced a simplified force field in her groups in the eighties and invited her groups to list their satisfactions and dissatisfactions after a group session. She noticed that the satisfactions often were related to the group task, and the dissatisfactions with the defenses against that task (Agazarian, 1986). The current practice is that groups list behaviors they observe in the session, discriminating which behaviors help to reach the group goals, and which get in the way. They use this information to do a little less of what gets in their way and to make more room for what helps. They may also formulate a hypothesis on the phase of development they are in, based on the implicit goal derived from the restraining forces.

In the Authority Issue Group, we use force fields to support our personal development. This is a slightly different and very interesting use of force fields, and it takes some getting used to. In this article, I would like to share some of our learning process with the SCTRI community.

In SCT, we understand ourselves in the context of the systems that we belong to and co-create: our families, schools, businesses, labor unions, political parties, churches, sports clubs and SCT groups. We not only participate in their tasks, we're also involved in their development as systems: establishing the distribution of authority and the degree of trust that help these systems survive and grow. Doing this, we contribute to the system balance between innovation and continuity, and strike a balance between our desire to learn and our want for security.

As we develop as persons, we develop our ability to contribute to the development of these systems. We learn by reflecting on our behaviors in context. Our own impulses and actions express the state of the systems we're in: our anxieties, our anger, our sense of belonging and our sense of separation reflect the phase of system development. We can understand the meaning of our actions for the system by looking at what happens next, i.e., whether the system moves in the direction of its goals, or not. From that, we can develop an understanding of which behaviors were driving and which were restraining to system development.

An SCT group drawing a force field at the end of a session has a shared experience of that session as the context of its work. Members capturing the state of their learning in a personal force field summarize their driving and restraining forces in many different contexts. The extra work they need to do is to grasp the way these contexts are related. The theory of living systems offers us two frameworks for doing just that: the concept of phases of system development and the concept of the system hierarchy.

From the perspective of phases of system development, we see three goals: to come to terms with the authority of our fellow members and our own (the work of the authority phase); to accept our interpersonal differences and build on our similarities (the work of the intimacy phase), and to contain our impulses before we decide what to do next (a condition for doing interdependent work). Contributing to these goals means assisting our systems in developing an effective distribution of authority, establishing a climate of trust and developing the capacity of the system for adaptation and learning. Failing these goals means we are introducing restraining forces to the achievement of these goals in our systems, making it more difficult for them to survive, develop and transform.

Using our personal force field, we develop an understanding of our responses to conflicts around authority and differences around intimacy. What do these responses solve, for ourselves and for the context? Which ones drive the process of differentiation and integration of information forward, which ones restrain it? A personal force field allows us to make that differentiation and remember it – so that we can keep it in mind next time we're in a similar context.

The second perspective is that of the Russian dolls of the hierarchy of living human systems: person inside member inside subsystem inside system-as-a-whole. As we bring in our personal information across each boundary to the next level, we contribute to the information processing in the system at that level – or we introduce noise and interrupt this processing. Going from person to member, we make our primary information available for our subgroup. Going from member to subgroup, we participate in discriminating and integrating differences. Going from subgroup to system-as-a-whole, we participate in the survival, development and transformation of the system in its wider context (Agazarian, 2006). At each level, our communications may act as a driving force in relation to the goal of that level, or as a restraining force if we introduce noise. In our personal force field, we can capture our strategies for communicating information and for restraining communication: to increase our awareness of the context and impact of our behavior and to develop a repertoire of alternatives that we can pause and consciously select from, rather than acting on impulse and bypassing the choice that we do have.

An alternative to looking at behavior in context is to discriminate good and bad behaviors based on fixed norms. The goal of our learning then is to conform more and more to these norms, becoming better human beings in the process. Indeed, SCT has strong norms that are introduced in SCT groups by the leadership right from the start. These norms are the norms that groups typically develop when they succeed in reaching the interdependent work phase (Agazarian, 1997). Rather than prescribing conformance to authority and promoting group cohesion, they are norms for open communication, supporting the group in developing its capabilities to make contact with and explore its inner and outer realities without prescribing the desired outcome. As a consequence, force fields are not about good and bad behaviors: the same behavior may be driving in

relation to the goals of one context, but restraining in another. Performing, discriminating and capturing restraining behaviors in a force field are driving in relation to the goal of learning and an integral part of developing the capability to self-correct. In other words: making mistakes is good if we learn from them!

In its close attention to observable behavior in relation to what comes before (its antecedents) and what happens next (its consequences), SCT is similar to behavioral learning theory. But behavioral learning theory and SCT have a different focus. With behavioral learning theory, the focus is on the individual and her behavior. In SCT, the focus is on the system as the context for behavior: what triggered the behavior, what did the behavior induce in the system? Analysis of the behaviors does not expose the individual, but makes sense of the behavior in context. It's not just about the person, it's very much also about the system context and about the human condition.

In this way, the personal force field is an instrument to get to know ourselves a bit better. Not in a self-centered way, but in a systems-centered way; not to become ideal persons, but to participate a bit more effectively in the systems we co-create with our fellow human beings.

-Roelof Langman

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For details on the force field assignment of the Authority Issue Group, see the description of #401 Authority Issue Group in the Conference area of the website.

SUBGROUPING IN THE SLUMS _____

In February this year two of my children and I visited Kibera (Nairobi), one of the largest slum areas in the world. Our guide was a young, friendly Kenyan man who had grown up in Kibera and was still living there. His self-declared mission is to support the survival and development of his people, who are among the poorest in Kenya. Francis is a self-educated and practical man who speaks English well and exudes an aura of hope combined with practicality and seriousness. In SCT terms you could say that Francis is working day and night to increase the permeability in the boundaries between living human systems that strive for physical survival and living

human systems that have achieved physical survival and are able to focus on psychological/economical development and transformation. His method can best be described as walking among the people, talking with them and trying to assist them in solving problems that arise in Kibera. Many people in Kibera know Francis and trust him.

We were walking by an area that had been completely burned down during the violence that followed after the Kenyan elections in December. As we were walking among the ruins of what used to be a shopping center built of huts, Francis stopped to introduce himself to a young American woman representing an aid organization delivering free medicine in the area. He began speaking to her very politely in his well-spoken and self-taught English, proceeding to introduce us (the tourists) with the words: "Hardly any people from outside the slums come here, because they are afraid... except for a few, like this family. The very few who come, put their differences aside for a while to meet with us living here in Kibera." As their conversation went on, I lost track for a few seconds. I was "making room" to fully take in what this man, without any formal education, had just put into words. "They put their differences aside for a while." "Wow," I said quietly to myself, "he is talking about functional subgrouping without even knowing there is a term for it." Intuitively, Francis understood the concept of functional subgrouping and how it potentiates human survival, development and transformation!

In the two hours that followed, the four of us had some good moments meeting with some of the people in Kibera including children attending a school for the very poorest. The strategy to get these children to attend school is to serve them a meal each day. After a while of regularity in structured meals (as Yvonne Agazarian puts it, "structure always comes first"), the children discover that learning is complementary to food and physical survival. These children, as well as the adults whom we met during the visit, people who basically had almost nothing from a materialistic/economic perspective, shared their smiles and curiosities and body gestures with us, and were proud to speak simple English phrases as we attempted to make the barriers between us more permeable to the exchange of information.

We experienced functional subgrouping in a pure and spontaneous way, in which recognizing the similarities in the apparently different, created an atmosphere of mutual exploration. Thank you Francis, for your generous mind and spirit. I deeply respect you for your sincere and generous caring of people. You certainly contribute to the development and transformation not only of Africans but all living human systems!

-Katarina Billman

EMBEDDEDNESS, REFLECTION, MINDFULNESS AND THE UNTHOUGHT KNOWN _____

In his important new book, *Attachment in Psychotherapy*, David Wallin, PhD, highlights several important concepts from recent research in attachment theory, interpersonal neurobiology and mindfulness meditation. In this article I would like to

explore four key concepts that have emerged from his and others work: “*embeddedness*,” “*reflection (or mentalizing)*,” “*mindfulness*” and the “*unthought known*” and relate them to the Theory of Living Human Systems.

Embeddedness, Reflection and Mindfulness

The first three of these ideas may be considered as a triad that illuminates a progression of consciousness from a limited state in which we are blended or embedded in the content of our experience, to a more liberated state in which we discover ourselves as the *awareness of awareness*. From this meta-awareness, we discover that we can learn to dis-identify with the contents of our awareness and as that “awareness of awareness” that we are capable of interacting with every dimension of our experience with a sense of freedom and flexibility. Where a person is on this continuum also has great relevance for assessing their attachment status as understood in the research of Mary Main (2000) and Fonagy (2001).

Let’s begin by defining our terms:

Embeddedness refers to the frame of mind that has the experience that for as long as an experience is happening, it is the experience. In other words, in an embedded frame of mind, we are blended or merged with the experience and have no capacity to reflect on the feelings, emotions, somatic sensations, or mental representations that are passing through our awareness as *information* about our experience.

This state of mind has both pluses and minuses. For example if we are immersed in the experience of listening to music, playing a sport, or dancing, we don’t want to be “one off” from our experience, reflecting on the information. Similarly, if we are in a dangerous situation, such as when we encounter a poisonous snake on a mountain path, we simply want to be able to jump out of harms way as fast as we possibly can. Stopping to reflect on the particular variety of snake would have negative survival value. Neurologically, the state of embeddedness is connected with the “fast path” of neurological processing that involves the limbic system and the amygdala, bypassing the hippocampus and the frontal cortex (Siegel, 2007). On the negative side of the equation, if we are in a discussion with our spouse, and she or he says something that makes us angry, stimulating inside us the impulse to strike out, acting on this impulse will have obvious negative consequences. In this way, the state of “embeddedness” has both adaptive and maladaptive roles in the human experience. It is when we are fixated in an embedded state that it is indicative of difficulties in early attachment experiences (Wallin, 2007).

Reflection refers to our capacity to reflect on the sensations, thoughts and emotions that are passing through our awareness as *information* about our inner and outer environment. In reflection we have the capacity to look at our experience symbolically, to process the information that we are receiving and reflect on it before we act on it. Neurologically, this capacity to reflect on our experience involves the frontal cortex and the hippocampus (Siegel, 2007). It is arguable that all forms of psychotherapy, including (perhaps even especially) SCT, develop our capacity for reflecting on our experience as information about our inner and outer context. In fact, without the capacity for reflection, the whole project of psychotherapy (and perhaps human civilization as well!) would have no foundation to stand on.

The capacity for reflection is also a critical measure used in the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI), which Mary Main and others have used to assess attachment status in adults (Main, 2000). In broad strokes, the less developed someone’s capacity to convey a coherent, reflective narrative of their attachment history, the more insecure their attachment status. Individuals that are able to convey a coherent narrative of their early history have developed a coherent sense of self based either on secure early attachment experiences or on an “earned” secure attachment status. (An earned secure attachment refers to the important finding that although someone may have been born into a situation that afforded him or her little opportunity to develop a secure attachment, it is possible to “earn” a secure attachment later in life through reflective work.) In Wallin’s words, these individuals demonstrate a self that “(1) makes sense rather than being riddled with inconsistencies, (2) hangs together as an integrated whole rather than being fractured by dissociations and disavowals, and (3) is capable of collaboration with other selves.” (Wallin, 2007, p. 133).

All psychotherapies have the goal of developing an individual’s (or a systems’, if we think isomorphically) capacity to live from a coherent, centered self. This coherent, centered self, by definition has the capacity to reflect wisely on experience and to make choices that are less and less predetermined by the reactivity, conditioning and fixations of old roles and redundant, repetition compulsions and that further the goals of whatever context he or she is in. In systems-centered terms, people who have a coherent, centered, self are more capable of taking up citizenship (a member role) and of using the information in their personal systems in the service of the groups goals.

Mindfulness takes this capacity the next step and can be seen as the natural, developmental flowering of our capacity for reflection.

In a mindful frame of mind, we are not so concerned with the content of our experience and using that content as information by which to steer our choices in life, as we are with our capacity to be *aware of awareness* itself. In other words, in mindfulness, we realize that all of the contents of our awareness are impermanent and that at the center of our being is a distinct and separate capacity to observe our experience without blending with that experience. As we cultivate this inner observer, we discover a spacious openness and acceptance that grasps at none of the thoughts or experiences that are floating through awareness and instead rests simply as awareness itself, without subject or object. In a mindful state of being, we discover the consciousness that is the ground of our experience and dis-identify from all of the contents of that experience. We become the “hovering attention” that Freud discovered was at the heart of a healing, therapeutic stance, capable of holding all of the contents of our own and others experience with compassion, clarity and acceptance, without identifying with any position. This choiceless awareness, without agendas or preconditions, is the heart of mindfulness. As we uncover and cultivate this natural capacity, we discover with greater precision, subtlety and acuity, the different fixations in our bodies and minds that hinder our freedom. We also become progressively more skillful at untangling the knots in our own

and others reactivity and defenses. Gradually we shift our fundamental understanding of our identity from whatever roles we might play in life to *simple awareness itself with no essential, permanent content* to it at all.

This mindful stance has tremendous relevance for our practice as psychotherapists and as SCT practitioners, as well as ontological significance for our philosophical understanding of human nature.

If we take seriously that at the center of being is *pure awareness without any permanent or essential content*, we are called to a continual process of deconstructing the identities and fixations that we erect to protect us from the unknown. The capacity to “sit at the edge of the unknown” becomes not simply a minor breakthrough in the mental constructs and maps of our mind reads or negative predictions, but also a philosophical statement about the ultimate nature of being human. This capacity for mindfully holding the impermanence of all that is, including ourselves, becomes the fundamental stance from which we intervene with everyone that comes to us for consultation. From this perspective, when we consciously take on the role of “SCT Therapist” we do so from a place of great inner freedom and creatively play a functional role in the service of the goals of whatever context we are consulting to. From this view, the important question to ask is not whether our experience is authentic (all experiences are authentic) but whether it is functional and in the service of the greater good and the systems goals. In systems-centered thinking, this is the boundary between our “*person system*” and our “*member/consultant system*.” From the perspective of mindfulness, it also introduces the implicit goal that the people who come to us for consultation awaken to the realization that the core of who they are, is this *pure awareness of awareness* free from fixations in their body and mind. From the perspective of mindfulness practice, this is the goal of *liberation*.

Neurologically, the cultivation of mindfulness has tremendous ramifications. Again without elaborating too deeply here, the practice of mindfulness calms the reactivity in the autonomic nervous system and produces a state of neurological coherence that is stable, adaptive, flexible and energized. Interestingly, it also seems to develop the areas in the brain that are associated with happiness. (If you are interested in exploring the neurological implications of mindfulness, you may want to read Dan Siegel’s book, “*The Mindful Brain*” (Siegel, 2007).)

The Unthought Known

What then is the “unthought known”? Christopher Bollas first coined this provocative phrase in 1987 (Bollas, 1987). Basically it refers to what we “know” but for a variety of reasons may not be able to think about, have “forgotten,” “act out,” or have an “intuitive sense for” but cannot yet put into words. In psychoanalytic terms, it refers to the boundary between the “unconscious” and the “conscious” mind, i.e., the “pre-conscious mind.” In systems-centered terms, it refers to the boundary between what we know apprehensively, without words, and what we know, or will allow ourselves to know, comprehensively with words. (In many ways, although the methods are very different, the psychoanalytic goal of “making the unconscious conscious” is equivalent to the systems-centered goal of making the boundary permeable between apprehensive and comprehensive knowledge.)

If we conceptualize the unthought known as what we already know but don’t yet know that we know, there are several ways that we can excavate this knowledge. According to Wallin, one of the most important methods is to pay exquisite attention to our bodies. The systems-centered methods for undoing tension can go a long way towards this goal.

When we turn our mindful attention to our bodies we begin to uncover knowledge and experience that has been buried for many years. When we make old, fixated patterns of tension conscious we begin to dissolve blockages in the flow of energy and information at multiple levels of our bodies and mind. As this energy and information begins to flow, we begin to decode the non-verbal information in our present here-and-now environment as well as release energy and information that we may have compartmentalized at some point in our past. Historically, it may have been important to wall off this knowledge because to have allowed ourselves to truly know our experience at the time would have been disruptive and perhaps even dangerous.

Another source of uncovering the unthought known is to explore the repetitive roles that we act out in our interpersonal relationships and the corresponding redundant roles that we induce in others. When we release the energy and information that is held in these roles, we travel a long way towards the goal of liberating ourselves from unconscious fixations and patterns. Once we have done this we are free to choose the roles that are adaptive for the situation that we are in at the moment and release the roles that are maladaptive.

Perhaps the deepest level of the unthought known is the heart of the teachings of mindfulness meditation. The heart of these teachings, which we know already but have forgotten, is that fundamentally *we are awareness itself*, already liberated from our fixations, fears and redundancies, without essential content, beyond subject and object, everything and nothing, and that whatever we are in life we also are not. This is the “non-dual” consciousness at the heart of so many mystical and meditative traditions (Wilber, 2003). In other words, the deepest level of the unthought known and the *edge of the unknown* are the same thing.

-Michael Robbins

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BRIDGING THE SCT THEORY AND PRACTICE: INFORMATION FROM EMOTIONALLY FOCUSED THERAPY

SCT has contributed a seminal understanding that living human systems survive, develop and transform by discriminating and integrating information. Towards the goal of bridging SCT theory and practice with other therapeutic paradigms, this article offers information gleaned from Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT) for couples and its attachment basis, highlighting similarities and differences between SCT and EFT.

Overview of Similarities and Differences between SCT and EFT

In its application to the therapeutic context, SCT and EFT have much in common. Similarities include: 1) a focus on developing the working environment or system in a way that supports each client's work, 2) a directive therapist who makes explicit the use of theory and method while proceeding together with clients through predictable stages, 3) a systemic perspective that helps clients to develop a capacity to observe multiple levels in the contextual hierarchy, 4) experiential moment-to-moment exploration in order to discover, expand upon, and organize experience that is out of awareness, 5) the importance of attunement in eliciting this exploration, 6) guiding or vectoring the information towards the universal and primary experience of being human, especially primary emotions, and 7) a psychodynamic perspective with theory and method that works with the impact of family origin and its attachment bonds upon present internal and external conflicts.

SCT is a theory-driven model; in contrast, EFT is primarily a practice-driven model. Specifically, Susan Johnson derived the method of EFT from her work with couples. By reviewing tapes of her sessions with couples, she collected data that correlated interventions with the creation and maintenance of a secure attachment bond between partners. She then discovered that her interventions largely reflected a synthesis of systems, psychodynamic, and experiential therapies.

Confirmed by empirical studies for its effectiveness, EFT theory and method emphasizes understanding and applying attachment theory as it appears in each level of the hierarchy, particularly within the inner world or person system of each partner as well as the external interactions, or information flow, between partners. So from that perspective, EFT may have useful information for SCT practitioners, not only for work with couples, but for other contexts as well. Described next are two specific areas where similarities and differences between EFT and SCT are identified.

Role Locks or the Negative Dance

Well known amongst couples are unresolved problems and interactions that happen over and over, appear endless, with pervasive feelings of being stuck, alone, and disconnected from each other. Understood in SCT as role locks, these closed boundary interpersonal systems, embedded within the couples system, result in little or no information transfer within and between partners. Typical role lock communications -- often attack/defend, attack/attack, attack/withdraw, and yes-but patterns -- direct energy towards the primary goal of survival of

the system with consequently reduced free energy for the secondary goal of everyday living and problem solving.

The SCT protocol modifies restraining forces (defenses) to system development within phases that occur in a predictable sequence. From the SCT perspective, work with role locks can only be done after sufficient intrapersonal work has been completed. Hence, role lock defenses are generally undone subsequent to eliciting the observing self and to undoing phase specific individual defenses including social defenses and the triad of symptomatic defenses (anxiety, tension, and defenses against the retaliatory impulse).

In EFT, role locks are referred to as the negative cycle of interaction or the negative dance. Viewed similarly to role locks in SCT, little or no primary emotion transfer occurs in the negative cycle, which is characterized by rigid and repetitive interactions with absorbing negative emotional states, i.e., relatively fixed, unpleasant, or painful experiences that are sustained despite repeated efforts to interrupt them. The negative cycle communicates our deepest fears of separation, loss, and aloneness, and triggers defenses such as anxiety, depression and outrage that perpetuate the cycle. Like SCT, the first step in treatment requires eliciting an observing self, particularly at the subgroup level of the couple.

In contrast to SCT, the EFT therapist guides the couple in the first session to take a birds-eye view of the couples system as well as an insider's view of the person system. This involves directing the couple to observe and find out about the negative dance as they recall its presence outside the session and also its appearance inside the session. For example, questions directed to both partners include, "When you saw her turn her head, what were you thinking? What did you feel? What did you say? And then what happened? What did she say? What happens inside of you when she says that?" By understanding the primacy of the attachment bond in the experience of each partner, the EFT therapist reflects back to the couple the negative dance as two people missing the desired experience of what they know to be true -- that they take each other deeply personally and that they deeply care about each other.

In viewing this activity in SCT terms, moving up a level of the hierarchy supports both partners not to take themselves or each other just personally. Moving down a level supports the partners to experience how, by accessing care-seeking and care-giving impulses, they do take each other very personally. The role-locks are immediately undone, if only momentarily or temporarily. In the EFT perspective, the negative cycle is deescalated in the first stage of therapy, so that relief and hope ensue. Future work remains for the next stage, where, undoing role-locks or the negative cycle include exploring family of origin experiences as correlated in-the-moment to absorbing negative emotional states, similarly to the role work done in SCT.

An Attachment Perspective of Driving and Restraining Forces

Also well known amongst couples, at least in some form, is the conflict between too close and too far, which SCT conceptualizes as prominent challenges to intimacy. Expression of the conflict varies. Some examples are the common internal experience of survival threat that is not based in reality, e.g., "I can't

bear it when he holes himself up in his little world.” Or, “When she comes at me, I have to run to take cover.” Alternatively, the conflict may reflect survival of the partnership in reality, e.g., “I don’t know if I want to stay in relationship with it going like this.” These expressions are most frequently referred to as “communication problems” in the initial complaints offered by the couple. Often, when explored within the session, the experience of hurt, a combination of feelings including sadness, loss, reactive anger, and fear is uncovered and communicated. The conflict between too close and too far is embedded in the role-locks or negative cycle referred to earlier.

Attachment theory provides a potent vantage point from which to view driving and restraining forces -- the understanding of a primary goal, whether explicit or implicit, of pursuit of proximity, or safety and connection through relationship to another. From John Bowlby’s work, humans are hypothesized as innately wired to pursue and offer a secure base and safe haven, not only in infancy, but throughout their adult lives. A secure base offers a place from which to access the exploratory drive in order to venture out and engage with the world. Care-seeking and care-giving impulses are satisfied in the secure base, thus restoring the exploratory drive. Likewise, a safe haven also offers a place from which to return when care-seeking impulses are activated. The couple’s relationship, unlike many other contexts, provides a potentially viable context that satisfies the drive to meet and have met both care-seeking and care-giving impulses. EFT draws from Bowlby’s work by calling this dynamic accessibility and responsiveness.

From an attachment perspective, the conflict between too close and too far offers an understanding of the fork in the road between what may be termed moving-towards and moving-away, in relation to the primary goal of pursuit of proximity. The role-locks or negative cycle can be viewed as the couple’s attempt to manage conflicts and defenses that arise in this goal of pursuit. The driving forces consist of the innate and spontaneous moving-towards impulses. According to Una McCluskey, SCTRI member and researcher on attachment and attunement, these include 1) instinctual care-seeking and care-giving impulses, 2) the instinctual drive to create a context that supports people being themselves, 3) shared interest, and 4) sexual or physical contact. Moving-away consists of the defenses against moving-towards that result from fear. In the climate of the role-locks undone, the next step is to identify the easiest restraining force to weaken in the couples system so that the driving forces can be released.

In the words of McCluskey, the care-seeking impulse is often “infiltrated by personal defense.” This communication might sound like, “As usual, you didn’t call me. I waited and you never showed up.” When viewed only within the person system level, it is tempting to identify these expressions as restraining forces to weaken from the noise generated -- often attack, blame, or complain. However, if placed within the system of moving-towards, this communication, despite the noise inherent in it, can be hypothesized as a driving force towards the goal of proximity. One way to test the reality of this hypothesis is to see if the signal to noise ratio is sufficient so that information can be transferred. At the couples system level, this depends not only upon the sender but the receiver of the information.

In EFT, this type of communication is termed protest, derived from work by Bowlby with infants and children. The concept of protest stems from a reaction, with the experience of hurt and its defenses, to premature separation within a progression of stages (secure to protest to despair to indifference). Subsequent to identifying and deescalating the negative cycle, when a protest is sent (often from the partner termed pursuer), rather than boundarying or filtering out the noise within the protest before it crosses the boundary, the therapist places the communication within the context of attachment and the negative cycle. As a result, the boundaries of the receiver become more permeable.

The stage of supporting permeability of the receiver’s boundaries is termed withdrawer re-engagement, and includes support for the receiver not to take the protest just personally so that the care-seeking impulse embedded in the information sent can be received. If the care-giving impulse in the receiver can be activated, the care-seeking and care-giving impulses are then satisfied, restoring the spontaneous exploratory drive at the *person*, *member*, and *couples system* levels with resulting relief, safety, and connection for both sender and receiver. Withdrawer re-engagement is addressed before what is termed pursuer softening, i.e., supporting the pursuer to receive the care-giving from the re-engaged partner, which can happen only after the pursuer observes and deeply resonates with the challenge the withdrawer faces in receiving the protest.

Much of the work of the EFT couples therapy involves mutually accessing, exploring, and satisfying the care-seeking and care-giving impulses within the context of the attachment bond and restoring the exploratory drive, thus allowing the creation of an environment that supports the partners to be fully themselves. The couple then also has energy freed up to experience more satisfaction in other moving-towards activities such as shared interest and sexual/physical contact as well as their restored common sense in everyday problem solving.

Conclusion

Currently, the SCT community appears to be actively exploring how most effectively to elicit the source of energy within the *person* system, thus supporting crossing the boundary into membership with full aliveness and information. An understanding of attachment from practice-based evidence, particularly the management of care-seeking and care-giving systems at multiple levels of the hierarchy and in multiple contexts, provides important information towards this goal.

-Bonnie Macbride

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REFLECTIONS ON THE PERSON SYSTEM: GOING DOWN THE THEORY TUBE AND LOOKING UP

The *person* system holds a significant place in the SCT practice of the Theory of Living Human Systems (TLHS). It has also often been seen as a liability in terms of people taking up their *member* roles. In the TLHS, the person system is the circle nearest to the life energy in the “green stuff” (See Yvonne Agazarian's article, “1992 - 2007” in the Fall 2007 issue of System-Centered News). The personal defenses that take place within that circle in reaction to the phase specific issues in our environments “pinch” this circle tighter and reduce the flow of the green stuff up and out into the *member*, *subgroup* (SG) and *group-as-a-whole* (GAW) circles. This pinched circle results in a reduction of energy and information to flow up and out for survival, development and transformation in the system that the person is living within. A couple of examples of pinches would be familiar and repetitive mind reads (“people don’t care about me”) or negative predictions (“people will never hear me so why talk”) that come up predictably when that person is in any group in the early phases of group development. These personal defenses can coalesce into more organized personal defenses such as old roles (e.g., “one-down victim” and “one-up bully”) that more fully barricades access to the green stuff.

The pinch when we contract around our personal defenses also hurts. Thus, by not taking things “just personally”, we have a greater ability to move around and through these personal defenses and energetically live and influence our environments and reduce the potential pain of living in the world. Yvonne has done us all a world of good in clearly identifying the SCT way out of this constricted existence.

But we must be careful to not confuse the *person* system with the defenses of the *person* system. As a member of SCTRI, I’ve seen this kind of confusion when people stop their group input with “oh that’s my person system” (i.e., “that’s bad”) without clearly discriminating what are the personal defenses (that pinching process) vs. the personal interest/investment in the group topic (a path to the green stuff) that has spurred their group input.

Also in SCT, when we draw the four circles (*person*, *member*, *SG*, *GAW*), the *person* system is always the smallest. From the side view, there is always a set of nesting pizza pie pans with the *person* system being the smallest in the hierarchy. If you extrapolate this image into three dimensions by connecting the circles, you can see an “imagined” funnel that has the smallest end connected to the green stuff. This reduces the amount of flow of “green stuff” into the larger circles above. Perhaps this image is an example of an inadvertent SCT defense against the *person* system. This GAW pinch reduces the person’s ability to access more fully the green stuff and bring this energy into themselves and into their membership in the system.

I was heartened to hear Yvonne talk explicitly about this SCT system challenge we have with the *person* system in the last Newsletter. She wrote about the initial and important dichotomous thinking that launched the SCT practice of the TLHS. In order to keep the *person/member* boundary clear and emphasize the importance of moving into *member* (and therefore reduce the pain of living “just personally”), we inadvertently

created a system that had the person system “less than” the *member*, *SG* and *GAW* systems.

I want to build on her contribution with some different images and ideas about the *person* system that came from my participation in the SCTRI Conference in April. In my experiential group, we had a *GAW* image of sitting over a “reservoir of oil.” We had the challenge of tapping that pool and channeling the fuel into the group and then into the SCT system. I saw tubes going down and flowing around and through the room and into the larger systems outside the room. The other image was from watching the SCT Consultation process (i.e., “my problem is I” – and then following the “I” down). This process tapped into the green stuff (with the *person* system “I”) and linked it with the context that the consultee was having a problem in. I’ll call the context “blue stuff” for the purposes of my image and to balance out the term green stuff. In the SCT consultation, the consultee and consultant co-created a tube that connected the blue stuff with the green stuff. The energy of the consultation flowed “back and forth” between the blue and the green stuff. I left the Conference filled with these half-baked images and with some amount of mental indigestion.

These Conference experiences and images coalesced into a clearer image a few weeks later. I saw a “dumbbell” shape sitting upright on one end. The bottom bulbous end contained the green stuff (touching the ground) and the other end contained the “blue contextual stuff” (touching the air). The cylindrical tube that connected them was made up of equal sized circles of *person*, *member*, *SG* and *GAW*. (Figure A).

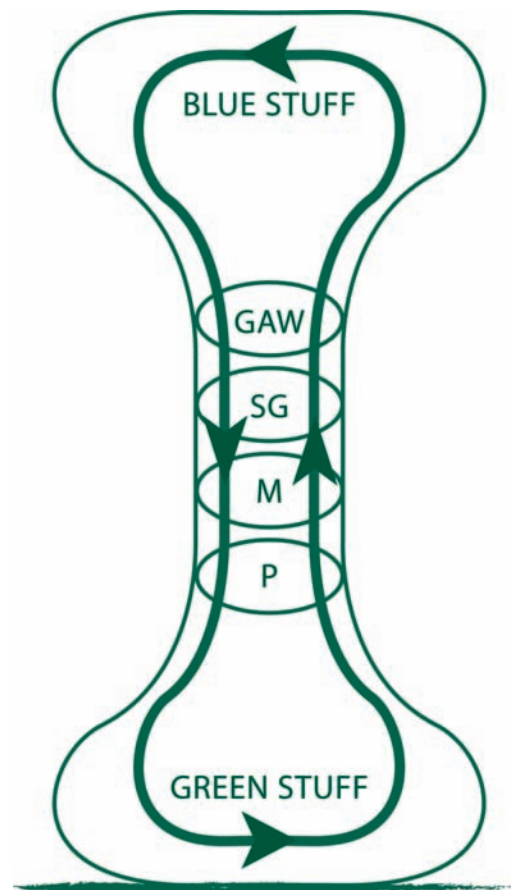


Figure A

This image really opened up a surge of interesting thoughts. In this image, the usual way we draw our SCT circles (Figure B) can be thought of as looking down this cylindrical tube (not the funnel shaped tube) from the contextual blue stuff. The difference in the sizes of the circles is created only by the perspective.

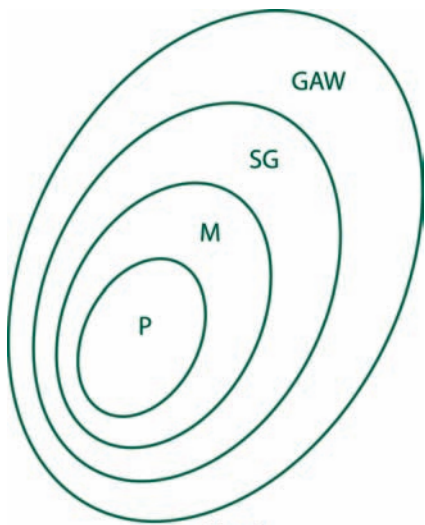


Figure B

Now if you do the imaginal exercise of going down this tube into the green stuff end and then looking up, you see a reversal in the size of the circles (Figure C). From this perspective, the *person* system is the largest circle that holds the *member*, *SG* and *GAW* circles. In this image the energy flow is reversed. This dumbbell image holds a couple of potentially useful bits for us. One is that this image gives an alternative to the *person* system pinch that comes from just looking at the *person* system as the smallest in a set of nesting pizza pie pans. In this image, hierarchy is created in reverse order by changing your perspective. Second, it gives us an image of how the SCT consultation process is co-creating a flow between blue stuff (the context) and green stuff (the life force) for the consultee's use.

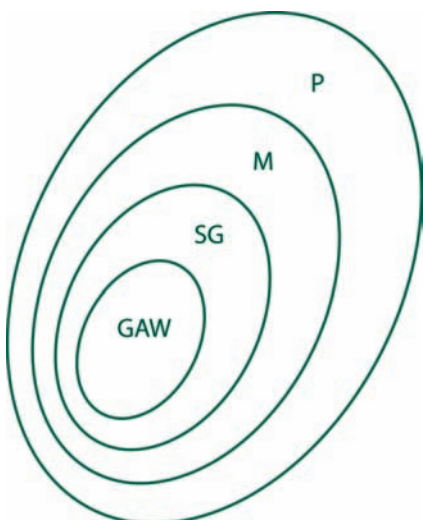


Figure C

This down and into energy flow from the blue stuff to the green stuff describes how we are personally transformed by the *GAW*. The *person* system is receiving blue stuff energy down and from the *GAW*. This blue stuff energy is being functionally discriminated in *SGs* within the *SG* circle. Then the blue stuff information that is pertinent to that person's membership is brought into the *member* circle and then finally the membership blue stuff that is pertinent to the person comes out into the *person* circle for integration and transformation of the *person* system.

Given this change in perspective, I ran these images and thoughts by Yvonne. She thought they were worth sharing with the membership with a clear statement that this reversal of "energy flow" from the *GAW* to the *person* system is different from what she writes about in SCT practice. Though it's different, I do believe that this image is TLHS informed. She encouraged me to share this image with the membership. Michael Silverstein and Michael Robbins, in their roles as editors of this section and of the Newsletter, were also encouraging. Through all of their support, I was able to stop my personal defensive pinch (a fear that I will be told this isn't appropriate material and a familiar one-down role of meddling rebel/trouble-maker) and have this image flow into the system. I am fascinated to see how you respond to this change in perspective and energy flow regarding the *person* system and where this information goes in the *GAW*.

- John Straznickas

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR CONFERENCE 2009!

SAN FRANCISCO

Pre-Conference Institutes:

April 18-19, 2009

5-Day Conference:

April 20-24, 2009

for more information go to:

www.systemscentered.com

SYSTEMS-CENTERED® TRAINING PROGRAM

SCT TRAINING OVERVIEW

There is a wide variety of training opportunities at the four levels of training described below, as well as specialty training with SAVI (a communications model) and with SCT applied to couples and organizations.

Systems-centered training combines group work practicum (where you learn by working as a member of a group), and theoretical and technical training. You can learn about SCT by attending training events at the level that matches your interest and resources, i.e., time, energy and money. These training tracks range from exploring SCT to making a commitment to formal training. The approach to training is functional with less emphasis on “checking off” certain experiences and more on mastering the theory, methods, and techniques at each level of training.

Levels of SCT Training: *Exploration, Foundation Training, Intermediate Training, and Advanced Training.*

Exploring SCT: For Curious People

In exploring SCT you can attend foundation or specialized training events once or as many times as you find useful. Some find the training group valuable for their own development; others want to learn the theoretical approach well enough to compare it to their own; others use elements of theory and technique in their current practical applications. At this level of participation, you are your own guide, sipping or drinking deeply as your interests and resources permit.

Foundation Training: For Learning SCT

Some people discover enough value in SCT theory and practice to consider making SCT a primary orientation to their work. The Foundation training emphasizes learning to use SCT methods with one’s self and gaining the personal development and training that comes from working in an ongoing training group with sufficient intensity to explore and contain one’s own issues with authority. At a minimum, a training group and some work with theory are foundations to further work in SCT. If you find yourself exploring this shift into more structured training, you should make contact with an SCT Mentor to find out more about the training process.

Intermediate Training

Intermediate training is for those interested in using SCT as their major theoretical orientation and work toward the goal of becoming a licensed systems-centered practitioner.

Members apply for Intermediate training experience after having learned to use SCT as a training group member, to understand basic SCT theory, and to understand and contain the dynamics of their own authority issue. The Intermediate level of training introduces more focus on theory, on the technical skills of SCT, on managing role boundaries, and on containing the dynamics of a system. Intermediate training includes the Intermediate Skills Training, the Intermediate Mentor Training, and the Authority Issue Group. The Skills Training focuses on the technical skills of defense modification in Modules I and II. The Intermediate Mentor Training focuses on the management of oneself in relation to changing roles and contexts. The Authority Issue Group is a training group working the issues of Module III in depth. At the Intermediate level, participants also work in a Theory group and in an ongoing Consultation group in addition to their ongoing training group.

Advanced Training

Advanced training activities emphasize integrating comprehensive and apprehensive knowledge in role related to goal and context in application settings. One major advanced training track is working as a member of a peer licensing group to build a working group, develop criteria for assessment, and implement a peer assessment process. Joining the Board of Directors is another context for advanced training. An advanced training track is also offered at the annual conference for post-Authority group members and a special advanced training group is offered each summer. Advanced members also work with mentors to develop training opportunities.

USE OF THE SCT® TRADEMARK

Only licensed practitioners of SCT can call themselves **Systems-Centered** anything!

All others call themselves **systems-oriented** and **MUST** be careful not to link that nomenclature to SCT or Systems-Centered.

Anyone who wants to use SCT materials or the terms *SCT* or *Systems-Centered*, and who is not licensed, must apply for a Project License by contacting the trademark holders, Yvonne Agazarian or Susan Gantt (in SCTRI Director role).

SCT PROGRAM NOTES

This section of the Newsletter contains official information about the evolving SCT training program. In this issue we are focusing on the Five-Day Intermediate Skills Training, the “gateway” training experience for the intermediate level training. This is especially timely since the next Five-Day Intermediate Skills Training is in Philadelphia in November 2008!

Intermediate Level training continues the personal and cognitive development begun at the Foundation Level. However, beginning with the Intermediate Skills Training, trainees shift their focus from learning SCT with themselves to using the methods and techniques with others. This shift is for those wanting SCT to be their major orientation. Making this shift signals the requirement to enter ongoing consultation with a licensed SCT practitioner. This consultation is the major environment in which trainees develop, over time, their ability to build systems-centered systems and to apply systems-centered theory, methods and techniques in their own work contexts.

The Intermediate Skills Training introduces the SCT protocols for undoing defenses with an emphasis on the theoretical context within which the protocol is used. The training includes lectures, demonstrations of SCT protocols, and practice sessions with each trainee having an opportunity to be both the leader teaching the protocol and the client experiencing the undoing of defenses. The protocols focus on the skills for undoing anxiety, tension, depression, outrages, and role locks. These practices are videotaped and the review of the tapes is designed to develop the trainees’ skills for creating force fields and giving and receiving feedback.

In addition to practicing and reviewing the protocols, participants have the opportunity to learn to build a task group and to take up leadership roles in a task group. An experiential group each day provides the participants with an opportunity to have an apprehensive experience of the freeing up of energy and the development and transformation of the group as they undo their own defenses and vector their energy toward functional subgrouping.

There is an application process for the Five-Day Skills Training. If you are interested in applying, consult with your Foundation Group Trainer.

Other components of the Intermediate Training Program are listed below:

- **Three-Year Intermediate Group (prerequisite: Intermediate Skills Training):** This group is for those who want to continue their training in an ongoing group but who are not currently in the licensing track.
- **Intermediate Leadership Training (recommended):** Offered at the annual SCT Conference and in York, UK, this skill sequence is in addition to the Intermediate Skills Training and focuses on the basics of building a functional system using the systems-centered methods and techniques.
- **Ongoing Consultation with a Licensed SCT Practitioner (required):** This is the major environment for developing the ability to apply systems-centered theory, methods and techniques in your work context.
- **Container Training (recommended):** Work in the container role, in experiential practicum groups, is a transition role from member to leader. Containers work as members, fully taking up member role, but with a difference. The difference is deliberately focusing on one's own experience as a function of the group, and tracking the group's phases of development.
- **Mentor Training (by application only):** This is a six-day intensive training that builds on and reinforces the learning from the Intermediate Skills Training with further theoretical discussion, skill building, videotaped practicum session and force field review
- **Authority Issue Group (by application only):** Membership in this intensive training involves making a commitment to membership in a group that meets twice a year for approximately three years

Five-Day Intermediate Skills Training

November 16 – 20, 2008

Philadelphia

Trainer:

Dorothy Gibbons, LCSW

For information contact
dorothygibbons2@yahoo.com

SCT[®]RI REPORTS AND UPDATES

SCT[®]RI IN A NUTSHELL: THE ORGANIZATION

SCTRI is a volunteer organization. All roles (except Administrators) are filled with volunteer members who have time, energy and resources for the tasks. Working in an SCTRI Action Group is a learning environment for applying SCT in the service of task goals.

Board of Directors: Sets policy, oversees organizational direction, structure and function. This group meets twice yearly; selects, supports and guides the Director; and is made up of members at the advanced training level and beyond.

Director: Carries the organizational vision and values, oversees implementation, represents the organization to the larger world.

Research Director: Develops the research function with goals of fully integrating research into SCTRI and crossing the boundary to the larger world.

Steering Group: Implements policies and links Action Groups. Selected by and acts with the authority of the Board of Directors between its semi-annual meetings; meets weekly.

System Mentors: Keep an eye on the overall functioning of SCTRI and system-centered training with the goal of maintaining the spirit and values of SCT. Mentors consult to members and Action Groups as needed, and hold the final authority for accepting recommendations for licensing individual members as SCT practitioners.

Action Groups: Small groups of members carrying out specific aspects of the work of SCTRI.

Currently:

- Annual Conference
- Continuing Education
- Curriculum Development
- Electronic Communications/Web
- Fundraising
- Membership
- Newsletter
- Research
- Trainers

Administrators: Carry out organizational tasks under the supervision of the Director and the Steering Group.

STEERING GROUP

The Steering Group meets weekly to implement SCTRI policies and programs and to maintain the organizational vision between the semi-annual Board of Directors meetings.

Currently we are keeping an eye on how to support Action Groups in building systems that will facilitate their work. We are working well internally and recently submitted a force field in our report to the Board of Directors, so they could assess the development of our group.

In putting the force field together, we found that we are particularly satisfied with our increased ability to link with the organization's subsystems and to function as consultants to these systems as opposed to getting caught up in implementation of their tasks. We are also pleased with our increased ability to think systems, particularly role, goal and context and our decreased dependency on Susan Gantt in her Director role. We look forward to taking this increased independence further by not only linking, but also actively training subsystems and consulting to structure.

Over the last six months we have met with a number of Action Groups (Conference, Fundraising, Research, and Treasurer/finance system) at our monthly Open House (held the first Tuesday of each month at 11:00 AM ET) and have learned that attendance at the Open House is driving to new Action Groups as they start to build their system and focus their goals and also driving to established action groups as they develop their next steps. We welcome you to join us monthly or to participate in our semi-annual Summit meetings, open to any member of SCTRI.

We look forward to our next six months of development.

*-Susan Gantt, Dorothy Gibbons, Joy Luther
& Michael Silverstein*

CONFERENCE 2008

Welcome back from the Conference 2008! Here are some of the highlights: we had our largest Conference ever, 150 participants, which included 40 first-time SCT Conference participants. We also succeeded in having well attended weekend institutes that included the following: SCT Foundation Training, two SAVI programs, Bodydynamics, SCT and Neurobiology, and Organizational Development Consultancy.

We made a conscious effort this year to offer at least one clinical, organizational development (OD) and SCT theory based workshop on each day of the Conference as part of the afternoon workshops. This was in response to the feedback from 2007 Conference participants, who requested more OD offerings at our 2008 Conference. Many participants reported particularly powerful learnings in these workshops which influenced the exploration and subgrouping work in the Large Group experience. A key theme of this year's Large Group work was the exploration of stereotypic differences, authentic diversity, and the challenges we all face in finding pathways toward discovering similarities.

Other exciting moments at the Conference included the Monday evening community dinner at Saha Yemenese Restaurant; Tuesday night's impromptu, wildly popular, wine and cheese sing along, spearheaded by Dayne Narretta; Wednesday afternoon's exciting and unexpected surprise that the Olympic Torch procession began right in front of our

hotel; a fabulous Thursday evening "Summer of Love" closing party; a wonderful workshop with guest speaker Walter Stone and Yvonne Agazarian on Friday afternoon; and a very friendly and accommodating hotel.

We would like to take a moment to talk about the process of how the Conference system gets built. In our SCTRI Conference system we have developed a leadership structure where the Conference directorship is shared. This means not working alone, which is an SCT norm. Sharing the co-directorship allowed for great fun and lots of leadership learnings. Our work was to oversee and guide the implementation of this year's Conference vision "Building Strategies for Change: Bridging Theory and Practice." Developing the words for our vision took some time and we faced the challenge of trying to convey a vision that would be clear, concise and encompass the various emerging areas of interest from the 2007 Conference.

The Co-Directors' work also involved managing the work of the Conference Coordinating Group (CCG). The CCG includes all members of SCTRI who volunteer for the various Conference work roles, such as scholarship fundraising efforts, public relations work, continuing education (which includes evaluations and providing certificates compilation), hosting and buddy system roles, local activity planning, web PR and Conference program coordination. We found that SCTRI members who participate in the CCG come into their roles with immense energy for creative work. In fact there was such an abundance of great ideas for the Conference this year, we could not implement all of them. Hopefully, these good ideas will be folded into the work of future Conferences.

The Steering Group in conjunction with the Administrative Staff gave us direction on how to take up our roles and access the resources of the SCTRI system efficiently, i.e., following the structure of a task group. This meant don't do "all" the work. Our task as co-directors was to activate the CCG as a whole, to assist them in taking up their task roles. Our hats go off to Kathy and Jan V. for training two therapists to vector their energy towards thinking systems and towards becoming practical, "good enough," Conference Co-Directors!

The last piece we want to mention is how the process of developing next year's Co-Directors system gets started. The 2009 Co-Directors are Holly Johnson and James Grund - "Welcome!" Jim and Holly began joining our weekly phone meetings with Kathy and Jan V. in December of 2007. Having Jim and Holly join our weekly Co-Director – administrative meeting enhanced our work and activated our self-observing system even further.

In 2009, as former Co-Directors we will be taking up the role of 2009 Program Coordinators and serving on the 2009 CCG. The tasks involved in the Conference Program Coordinator seem to be the natural next step for exiting Conference Co-Directors, as John Straznickas filled this role in 2008. He did a fantastic job putting together the 2008 program and we hope to build on his work.

The experience of taking up and being a Co-Director is hard work and extremely rewarding in terms of the leadership learnings and the positive, close working relationships that develop. We both agree it was an honor to work with each other, with the Administrative Staff, CCG, Conference Mentors, Steering Group and all the presenters. Thank you all for a successful Conference!!

-Susan Karpenko & Jim Peightel

CONFERENCE 2009

Having recently completed a very successful Conference in April 2008 in San Francisco, plans are already underway for next year, the 10th year of increasingly successful Conferences! Mark your calendars for April 20th through 24th, with the pre-Conference institute being held on the 18th and 19th. Jim Peightel and Susan Karpenko, the 2008 Conference Co-Directors, have officially "passed the torch" to the 2009 Conference Co-Directors, Holly Johnson and Jim Grund! We are most fortunate to have last year's Co-Directors in the role of next year's Program Coordinators, over-seeing the content of our overall program. Thank you Jim and Susan! It is rewarding to see the mentoring process in action, building the system from year to year.

Regarding specifics, we will be at the same location for the second year, the Golden Gateway Holiday Inn in San Francisco. The general feedback was that the facility was user-friendly with a nice atmosphere. Being the second time in the same location is a plus. We can all look forward to re-visiting favorite spots and restaurants as well as exploring this beautiful city for new ones!

We are happy to report that the core 2009 team has already been in the process of weekly phone bridge meetings with Kathy Lum and Jan Vadell since April! Our agenda has included reviewing the many high points from the '08 Conference which we hope to replicate, as well as brain-storming sessions geared toward capturing the emerging energy within the system for our '09 theme. We have a lot of energy, enthusiasm and excitement as we embark on what will surely be a rich and growing experience for all of us! We are still looking for people who would like to participate in being part of our team. Please contact Jim Grund at serpgrun@aol.com or Holly Johnson at hollyjo@valley.net. Thanks to all of you who have offered to take up significant roles for Conference '09, and to those of you who will be submitting proposals for presentations. See you in San Francisco!

-Jim Grund & Holly Johnson

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Differentiation of roles opens the horizon for better management and more efficient work efforts in the CE Group. In our most recent meeting we discovered that the Conference CE Coordinator Role (responsible for pre- and post-Conference management of CE credits) and the On-Site Coordinator Role (responsible for CE functions at the Conference) were overlapping in ways that created redundancy and unclear communication. These roles had been made separate years ago when it became apparent that there was too much work for them to be combined, which was mainly because of the large amount of energy needed for fairly straightforward tasks of data entry and the creation of individualized forms for each Conference presentation. With some creative thinking (thanks to Kathy Lum) we were able to combine the roles into one, and to give the new

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS _____

The “Web Group” has been focused on three areas in the last six months – re-designing a new, more interactive website, getting the 2008 Conference details on the website, and creating a new section on Organizational Applications of SCT in the public area of the website.

We’ve had some frustration along the way: the platform we were planning to use for the new website didn’t work out, and Roelof Langman, who leads our technical development, had to start again from scratch with limited resources. We’re on the lookout for a couple of people to join the group with some technical skills and a willingness to learn: specifically someone who is familiar with Microsoft Office. If anyone has web design skills, it would be an added bonus!

We’ve also had our satisfactions. We’re very excited about the interactive bits of the new website – there are Forums for members to subgroup around topics they choose. This will provide a home for subgrouping. For example, members can choose to join in a conversation on their experiences about the Conference. Some Forums are open to all members, and others are closed, such as the Licensing Groups and the Authority Issue Group (AIG).

The training section has also been redesigned, taking the input from members into account. We are hoping that it will be much easier for Action Groups to post information and minutes to the web. One of our next steps is planning some “teach-ins” on how to do this.

Another exciting development is that the Conference posting on the website was ahead of schedule this year. We got really clear about our role and the role of the Conference organizers, i.e., who is responsible for which part of the task. Our focus is on the “technical,” theirs is on the “content” part of the task. This discrimination was very much a driving force.

In addition, we received appreciative feedback on the new OD section under Applications. A subgroup of the web group worked on this with input from Susan Gantt in her role as Director of SCTRI. If anyone feels moved to do a similar bit on Clinical or Educational Applications, let us know, and we will support you and share what we learned from doing this.

To influence the emerging web site, let us know when you would like to visit. We’ll send you a link. You can let us know what you think through the Forum Experiences with the New Website!.

*-Claudia Byram, Rowena Davis, Lucy Fine, Roelof Langman,
Kathy Lum, Michael Silverstein, Alida Zweidler-McKay*

FUNDRAISING _____

Over the last year our Fundraising Action Group (FRAG) has focused on identifying restraining forces to obtaining grants, gifts, and/or endowments for SCTRI. Having access to funding sources outside SCTRI, or connections to people of means who understand and support SCTRI’s objectives would be superb driving forces. Outside funding sources would allow SCTRI more flexibility to allocate resources as it sees fit, and respond to our organization’s emerging financial developmental needs.

We discovered that requirements for obtaining grants are very specific, and are usually tied to particular research pro-

role greater management and vision responsibilities, while creating a new data entry role to get the more basic work done. As we moved from being stuck in roles that were bogged down in detail, to ones that differentiated tasks, freed up energy, this brought sounds of joy and relief into the group. As a direct result of this change, Jan Quirl decided to stay on as the Conference CE Coordinator—Hurrah! This is a case of isomorphism in action, and is similar to the change in SCTRI from a Management Group to a Board of Directors, which has freed up energy and brought greater differentiation into the organization.

Norma Safransky is also staying on in her role as Facilitator of New CE Efforts and CME’s. Thanks to her we have just completed our second year of offering continuing education credits to medical personnel at the annual Conference, an area we hope will attract more medical professionals to our organization and meetings.

If anyone is interested in joining the CE Group I’d love to talk to you and provide further details about a work group in which you can learn, have fun, and make a contribution to SCTRI. Please contact me at dickganley@aol.com.

-Dick Ganley

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT _____

Our group is reviewing and integrating into the curriculum the learnings from the licensing process and from the individual work samples. We are using this review process as the context for looking at the training program. For example, we discover whether there are competencies missing in a particular group, or are there competencies missing across groups? Are there things that we can include in the training that will make the licensing process easier?

We make certain that innovations in application and in theory and practice make it back into the curriculum, so that the information can be generalized across the system. For example, as the understanding and protocols for working with roles develops, we ask ourselves how it will get integrated throughout the training system. In addition, we are developing a description of the training program that is easily understood by members new to SCT.

We are also adding advanced and trainer training objectives to the curriculum. For example, trainers are expected to be able to build systems-centered systems, and to be able to introduce SCT into outside contexts.

A major focus of our work since October 2007 has been our own development as a work group, where we are exploring adding new members to our group. As of April, we have one new member, Mark Johnson!!

*-Claudia Byram, Fran Carter, Susan Gantt,
Dorothy Gibbons, Eileen Jones*

SUMMIT MEETING - DECEMBER 2007

posals and objectives. So far, we haven't found a match between the current research taking place within SCTRI (in the clinical domain, or organizational development), and grants that support the kind of research in progress.

Another area our group has been exploring is fundraising strategies specific to non-profit organizations. One resource we have identified is The Nonprofit Center at La Salle University in Philadelphia, a center that supports various aspects of nonprofit organizations including fundraising. FRAG member Jim Peightel has already participated in a workshop on fundraising. We will keep you posted on what we learn from those experienced voices. We have discovered that requests for funding from foundations often require a specific 3- 5 year business plan drafted to reflect the organization's vision for their future. This information was brought back to the Board at its last meeting.

We have clarified that our Action Group will focus on funding sources outside of SCTRI. The fundraising happening at the Conference each year will be kept separate from FRAG.

If you have energy for, interest or expertise in fundraising, please join us! We are meeting on the telephone bridge on the first Friday of every month at 10:00 AM EST..

- Verena Murphy, Jim Peightel, Elaine Pratt & Jan Vadell

RESEARCH

As you may know, the Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) study led by Larry Ladden has been under way since 2006. The study design is completed and the staff and resources for completing the study are in place. However, obtaining appropriate subjects has proven to be very difficult. Given the reality of the limited resources in our group, a subject recruitment task force comprised of Larry Laddan, Dorothy Gibbons and Joy Luther is working to help identify and reduce related restraining forces. Thank you, Larry, Dorothy and Joy!

In another exciting development, the Board of SCTRI - Austin has been audio-recording their monthly meetings to donate them to an Organizational Development study led by Verena Murphy and Rich O'Neill. Verena and Rich will be adding to the findings of Verena's already completed dissertation.

Rich O'Neill is also working with the recipients of this year's Yvonne Agazarian Research Scholarship on a study of subgrouping that is using SAVI to code several subgrouping sessions of an Authority Issue Group.

Finally, Rich and Susan Gantt are developing a new Subgrouping Questionnaire. Numerous versions of the new scale have been produced. Testing of the most current version has begun. Most recently they used it to collect pilot data from a Foundation Group at the Conference. That data is being analyzed and the scale will be modified accordingly before studies of its reliability and validity begin.

Thanks to all SCTRI members for your support of research!!

*- Ray Haddock, Larry Ladden, Verena Murphy,
Rich O'Neill & Jale Punter*

On December 11, 2007, SCTRI came together on the phone bridge for its bi-annual Summit. The goal of the Summit is for members to learn from each other and to develop our system-as-a-whole by providing members an opportunity to cross-fertilize about what is happening in the different training groups and regions. This Summit demonstrated and met this goal with a free flowing subgrouping structure that left no doubt that both the Summit system and the system as a whole is developing. We know that from the following data:

Although this was our smallest attendance of all six Summits we have held to-date, there were many roles and regions represented. Participants included trainers and trainees from clinical and organizational settings, members from Austin, Philadelphia, Atlanta and London, and Action Group members from the Boards of SCTRI and SCTRI-Austin, the Steering Group, the Curriculum Development Group and the Electronic Communications Group. All members who were present indicated they were attending from a want rather than a duty.

One training group in Austin had done work on whether they wanted to send a representative, and when they discovered that they did, the member easily chose himself to attend. The same group even had set aside time at the next training group to get a report back from their Summit representative! A member who had attended the first Summit back in May 2005, noted how much easier it was to get her voice in this time, suggesting that the Summit itself had evolved from a struggle for "time on the floor" to a "freewheeling subgrouping energy."

We started with identifying leading edges in training in the various contexts of which we were a part. The Austin intermediate group is working with reducing "as if" subgrouping and learning how to keep an eye on how fully they were joining. This led the Summit group to start to think about contexts in which good enough joining is sufficient (beginning groups) and when being overly attuned is a restraining force (organizational meetings). In Atlanta, there have been recent learnings around how a group kept a member in a role lock with the leader as a container for their authority issue, as well as innovative ways that the group kept new members out.

This led to a discussion of how in the UK they are structuring their training to keep new members in by making room for mixed levels of experience in the same workshop. The UK member stated that she believes that it is the members' getting clear about their goal for the training and the learning of theory as a group as a whole that enables both the experienced and the new trainees to meet each other in the experiential group. They then separate to practice skills and leadership training and come back as a large group. This was a learning for the Austin members, who noted that their training does not have a skill building or leadership training context at present, and that they are working on how to struc-

ture training for different levels of experience. There was also excitement at the system's ability to contain different training structures in different regions and that we weren't all in "lock-step."

With all this appreciation for difference and new members, we then started subgrouping on system development in the various regions at all levels of the system: person, member, subsystem and system-as-a-whole. Both Austin and San Francisco regions are curious about the roles they hold for the larger system, as well as where each group is in their phase of development vis-à-vis the larger system.

A similar question is occurring in the UK as they work to build both interest in training and developing their system. Atlanta has recently started a roundtable, based on Philadelphia's model that is building a sense of affiliation at the person level outside the training system. We discovered that development occurs when there is alignment at both levels: system goals that nourish and develop its members, who then in turn nourish and develop the system. It was restraining not to realign the structure when training goals and energy change.

As if on cue, what evolved next was a discussion of some of the changing energy and goals in training and consultation. An Austin consultation group is experimenting with using recordings and learning how to consult to the system based on the recordings. The SCTRI-Austin Board is being recorded for a Research Action Group project. We explored how a recording can be used for multi-purposes, i.e., data collection, self-monitoring, self-correction, training and assessment of training, and that these uses are developmental and hierarchical.

As a training institute, the earlier we can build recordings into the training contexts and make it routine, the easier it will be for the licensing group process to use it as an assessment tool. Starting with the easiest level, i.e., getting permission to record and self-monitoring of one's own recording was driving, calling it an "audition" was restraining. The next step is having a safe consultation environment to take the recordings into for assessment.

Finally, we came around to the subject of our Summit itself. We were curious about declining attendance numbers and wondered what this held for the system-as-a-whole. Is the bi-annual Summit one of those structures that is unnecessary, or does it require realignment with changing energy and goals? Or has the development and energy of the previous Summits not been adequately communicated across the boundary to the rest of the system? So with the latter goal in mind, we hope that this report has communicated the development of the Summit and the ease with which we worked as a group. We stay curious to see if the Summit is indeed still a relevant structure for our system.

- Dorothy Gibbons & Joy Luther

SYSTEM MENTORS

The last six months marks a real transition in the System Mentor group. We have begun the process of transferring the responsibility for assessing work samples presented for licensing as SCT Practitioners to the group of already-licensed members. This implements the vision that the community of licensed Practitioners will eventually contain responsibility for the assessment process that maintains the integrity of SCT practice.

We said goodbye to Yvonne Agazarian as one of the original core group of System Mentors, recognizing her contribution to developing the role and her leadership in addressing system-wide issues that emerged as our organization developed. We developed criteria for taking up the role of System Mentor and shared this with the Board of Directors. With the Board's approval and support, we welcomed Susan Cassano and Sven-Erik Viskari as new members

*-Claudia Byram, Fran Carter, Susan Cassano,
Susan Gantt & Sven-Erik Viskari*

TRAINERS

Here are some of the questions we have been addressing over the past few months – almost all of which are still in process: What is the difference between a task group and a therapy group? How do we use elements of mindfulness meditation to support the work of centering in our groups? How can we best use audio-taped recordings in our consultation groups? And finally, how do we adequately address issues concerning new members? If this sounds like a full agenda, it has been!

We have been having very lively and interesting discussions about the similarities and the differences arising from a new way of organizing our discussion and clarifying these discriminations. One trainer started writing down what he knew, and then sent it on to another trainer, and so on, until we had a group expression of what we thought the difference was between task and therapy groups. "Task groups" refer to any work groups, such as licensing, training, consultation, or an Authority Issue Group. This is in contrast with therapy groups. As a beginning point, we had the understanding that a task group has as a particular focus: to reliably cross from person to member, (for example by modifying 'yes-but' communications), so that members can cooperate in role, goal and context. The first goal is set by the group, which is the explicit task. The overall goal is to get the task done.

In a therapy group, the change for each member is in the person system. Development is focused on the person system with a goal of the development (maturing) of the intra-person system. We will update you as our "round-robin writing" continues along its path with trainers shaping and adding to this discussion.

LICENSING GROUP V

We are at the beginning of exploring what usefulness we might discover by integrating mindfulness into the centering process and crossing the boundary in therapy. We invited Larry Ladden to one of our meetings to help us shape this issue. Larry's input has been that mindfulness is connected with increased presence, focus and attention. In the SCT context mindfulness is a way of gathering our attention into this moment. There is increasing evidence that mindfulness work strengthens the positive outcome of therapy.

Already some trainers have been experimenting with mindfulness and shared their differing ways of introducing it at the beginning of a group. What is held in common is a focus on breathing and encouraging an observation of the feeling in one's body, not as a meditation, but as a way to further the work of centering. There was some early anecdotal reporting of decreasing anxiety, tension and distractions. This may be a way of recognizing the energy in the person system, moving more fully from person into member and bringing that member energy across the boundary, hopefully going on to work more fully and efficiently. As an experiment at this point, each trainer will try their own way of introducing and implementing mindfulness into centering and crossing the boundary. We will collect our data at further meetings.

The use of audio-tapes in consultations of actual clinical or organizational sessions is at the beginning edges of being used quite effectively and with some interesting learnings by leaders and members of consultation groups. The tapes seem to reveal the driving and restraining forces simply by playing not much more than 5-10 minutes of any session. The shift to the structure of "my problem is I...", as well as the problem or issue itself seems to get identified earlier and more easily in the work. Some of the innovations include doing an SCT diagnosis, noting how the section of tape relates to phase of development, and possibly role playing how to build the SCT system with attunement.

Also welcomed was the idea of using audio-taping earlier in the training process (before trainees submit samples for licensure later in the training track). Starting work with taping earlier in training without a focus on assessment seems to ease this transition. We anticipate less stress when one enters the licensing process where assessment is a key goal.

And finally, there are new members of our community who are taking up training roles! We will be sharing our work goals of the trainers group with them and inviting them to future meetings. We will bring you updates on this developing work in later newsletter articles. In the meantime: breathe...

-Rich Armington

Here is a brief report from task group Licensing Group V, summarizing our work. The task group was formed in November 2006, as 17 members of Authority Issue Group IV made the transition over to LGV. We worked as a task group from November 2006 to February 2008, a time period of 15 months. The membership in the group stayed constant during the entire period. We have been meeting regularly on the phone since December 2006. In addition to phone meetings we also met physically in Boston at the Conference in 2007. After setting a structure for our work and agreeing on norms, our first goal was to create LGV criteria for licensure, and to create an assessment tool based on these criteria. The second goal was to structure and work together through the assessment process. We built a structure of small teams, each responsible to assess 4-5 members. When each small team had accomplished its evaluations we exported the information from small teams into the LGV group-as-a-whole. We then moved over to our last, and final goal; LGV recommendation of LGV members as licensing candidates. The recommendations including criteria for each member were forwarded to System Mentors gradually throughout the year, reflecting our internal process and readiness to recommend individual members. Before the end of 2007 we had recommended all LGV members for licensure.

By the end of 2007, with some turbulence, we agreed our mission was completed. We then planned for a phone meeting marking the end of LGV as a task group. The last task group meeting took place in February this year. For this meeting we had three agenda items; unfinished business, good-byes, and exploring how LGV could give support to its licensing candidates in the future. We all agreed to fully support the remaining candidates to become licensed. The work of our group has been accompanied by process work, to keep up good energy and also to take care of restraining forces getting in our way. We have phased difficult process challenges at times, and we are proud of our work.

-Katarina Billman on behalf of LGV

**Congratulations to our new
System Mentors**

**Susan Cassano and
Sven-Erik Viskari**

**We would also like to express
our appreciation for
Yvonne Agazarian's
many years of service as a
System Mentor as we bid
her farewell.**

MEMBERS FORUM

This is a community forum for posting announcements on related trainings, personal life events, awards, letters to the Editor, and responses to articles that have appeared in our Newsletter.

IN MEMORIAM **MARY CRIST BROWN** **April 28, 1955 - May 20, 2008**

The SCT Atlanta community has lost a beloved and valued member to cancer. Mary Crist was an active member of the Friday monthly training group, the bi-monthly Monday training group, and the Atlanta Roundtable. Nationally, she completed her Mentor's Training and was accepted into the Authority Issue Group VI although her battle with cancer prevented her from attending a meeting. She will be remembered for her many contributions. She is deeply grieved.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS:

Gantt, S.P. & Hopper, E. (2008). Two perspectives on a trauma in a training group: The systems-centered approach and the theory of incohesion (part I & II). *Group Analysis*, 41(1), pp. 98-112; 41(2), pp. 123-139.

Macbride, B. (2008). *Teaching social and cultural foundations in counseling psychology: A synthesis of social justice theory in education and systems-centered therapy*. Dissertation, Ann Arbor: Proquest Publications.

Nanin, J., **Fontaine, Y.M.** & Wallace, B. (2007). Recommendations for researchers and clinicians working at the intersection of the HIV/AIDS and methamphetamine epidemics with MSM. In B. Wallace (Ed.), *Toward equity in health: A new global approach to health disparities* (pp. 393-411). New York: Springer Publishing.

O'Neill, R. M. & Constantino, M.J. (2008). Systems-centered training groups' process and outcome: A comparison with AGPA institute groups. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 58(1), pp. 77-102.

Davis, R. (2008). Complementary forms of writing for organisational learning. *Organizations & People* 15(1).

RECENT PRESENTATIONS:

This is a new section that lists recent presentations by members to reflect the increasing presence we have in the communities outside of SCTRI.

SCT was well-represented at the AGPA Annual Meeting in Washington, DC this past February:

Yvonne Agazarian, Special Institute Presenter, led an institute titled "The Impact of 'Thinking Systems' Rather Than 'Thinking People' on Group Psychotherapy. Contributing to the success of the institute as small group discussion leaders: Susan Beren, Claudia Byram, Fran Carter, Susan Gantt, Robert Hartford, Rich O'Neill, and Neil Spivack.

Claudia Byram led "From Contention to Conversation: Alternatives to 'Yes, but...' Dialogues in Groups, Couples and

Life." Susan Gantt led a workshop titled "Functional Role-Taking: Beyond Survival to Developing and Thriving in Organizations." Una McCluskey led "The Exploration of the Dynamics of Attachment in Adult Life."

Yvonne & Susan were panelists on the open session "Theory and Practice of Functional Subgrouping: The Systems-Centered Method for Resolving Conflicts in Power and Passion."

Susan Gantt was the keynote speaker at the October 2007 Professional Coaches and Mentors Association Annual Conference in San Francisco. Her presentation was titled "Making Common Sense Common: A Systems-Centered Approach to Coaching Individuals and Teams."

Cristiana deRysky led a presentation titled "Systems-Centered Therapy - A Leading Edge Method of Change for Individuals, Couples, Families, Groups and Organizations" at the May 13 Workforce Development and Training Department of the South Essex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust in Wickford, Essex, U.K.

Doug Johnson and Dorothy Gibbons presented a day-long institute at the annual conference for the Northeastern Society for Group Psychotherapy on June 13. The title of the institute was "Systems-Centered Training for Groups: Functional Subgrouping as a Method for Change." The conference was held at Wellesley College in Massachusetts.

Norma Safransky and Peter Bernhardt presented to Kaiser's mental health group in San Francisco in April. The topic was how SCT can be used to advance the treatment of borderline personality disorder and the connection between SCT and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT). The director reported that the next day a couple of therapists used the "anybody else" and joining on similarities in a session with a difficult family and were thrilled with the connections they made in session.

Michelle Billies, LCSW and Ph.D. Student at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York was awarded a 2008 Visionary Funds Grant by the American Psychological Foundation in the amount of \$5,000 for her participatory action research project focusing on how low income LGBT people survive violence and discrimination

LETTERS TO EDITOR

Dear Editor:

I've been digesting Yvonne's piece in the most recent Newsletter and I'd like to know whether an individual's person system can be in a different phase of development than the individual's member system at the same time.

If so, it would be helpful to me to have an example of how that could be the case. Also, I wonder if there's a formal definition anywhere of "person system" and "member system."

-Mark Perlmutter

Dear Mark:

Hi - glad you are interested. Systems are similar in structure and function and different in different contexts. Certainly the person system can be in a different level of development than a member system. For example, the person system may be in an intimacy phase of development, whereas the member system may be interacting in a subgroup in a system that is in the work phase, or in the flight or fight phase. As the context determines what work can and cannot be done, the member may be able to do work that the person may not be able to do alone. And vice versa. All systems are isomorphic. The goal of the person system is to develop a person-as-a-whole, through the interaction of subsystems (roles) whose development give the person-as-a-whole its transformational character. The person system goal is to survive, and to exchange information/energy with the member system (next system in the hierarchy. The person system exports a role system into the member system; the goal of the member system is to subgroup. The role, exported from the person system into the member system can serve either a driving or restraining force to subgrouping ... etc., I hope that has not confused you more.!

-Yvonne Agazarian

Dear Editor:

For the past two years I have been experimenting with using eye movement as a means of exploring role behavior and undoing role-locks. The method evolved spontaneously while working with a patient. I noticed that when I asked this patient to center as a way of moving out of a role, he would move his eyes to the left. After observing this behavior several times, I asked him what was happening as he looked to his left. His response was a clear and detailed description of the characteristics of the role he was in.

As an experiment I asked the patient to move his eyes from his left side to his right side and to describe what he noticed under that condition. He described a very different experience, one in which he was no longer in a dysfunctional role but instead clearly in the present with the resources of his authentic self available to him.

With subsequent patients I have been using this technique, and the results have been consistent, i.e., when moving their eyes to the left they can see their role clearly, and when moving their eyes to the right, they come out of role and are re-con-

nected to their authentic self. When out of role they often say that they feel free; the room feels brighter; they are no longer afraid, and they see what they need to do to solve their problem.

I would like to know if others have made similar observations.

-Jim Foulks

Dear Jim:

Wow, power stuff here! What you are describing is the power of working on functional and dysfunctional role behavior. SCT's clarity and simplicity about role is one of the core strengths of our techniques. SCT theory and techniques help us define functional role behavior and begin to describe techniques for noticing and undoing dysfunctional role behavior. The precise neurobiology of roles is not clear yet. Interesting ideas are emerging about limbic structures/circuits also involving parts of the prefrontal cortical lobes. There is nothing close to proven. Your eye-gaze approach is "beyond the research base". Given all the great minds that have pursued this behavioral Holy Grail, if one simple technique could undo dysfunctional role behavior, we'd all be doing it by now.

But this begs the question of why you are getting such powerful and useful responses from your clients. I believe this is an example of how a therapist, believing strongly in his/her work, helps the client do amazing work! Just be careful to observe when you are activating the compliant 'suggestibility' of individuals in our therapeutic work. One way I keep an eye out for non-useful compliance is to track whether or not the client's learnings are consistent and building across sessions. Yvonne Agazarian has been cautious about defining official SCT techniques for undoing dysfunctional roles perhaps due to some of these therapeutic challenges. I think at this point within our community, some of us are experimenting with role 'field research'. Your letter opens up the question to the membership - how are others experimenting with undoing dysfunctional roles in their clinical work?

Thanks again Jim for your starting us off on this discussion.

-John Straznickas

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listing all the latest information
on SCTRl trainings
can be found on the website at
www.systemscentered.com**

We Are Crossing a Boundary Now

an invocation

We are crossing a boundary now.
Leave behind your familiar maps
and time honored interpretations,
pack them neatly, and check them at the door.
They will be kept safe for you until you return,
though you may not want them anymore.

We are crossing a boundary now.
The constructs of the past and the future are slowly fading away.
Surrender your war stories, your tragedies, romances,
and catastrophizing into the flame of the Present.
Dear friends who have responded to the invitation
The ceremony has begun,
the bride and groom are at the altar,
let us not keep the guests waiting.

We are crossing a boundary now.
We have reached the edge of the Unknown,
the mystery from which all Creativity bubbles forth
like an effervescent spring of possibilities.
Make sure you have brought your curiosity along!

We are crossing a boundary now.
The threshold where the
Everywhere and Always
meets the Here and Now.
We ask that the energies of Self and Essence
guide us on our journey
and that we have the courage
to not hold back on our explorations.
We seek the wisdom to see through illusions,
to dissolve the fears
that we have told ourselves that we must hold onto
year after year after year.
The discrimination to know the difference between
the paper tigers and the real ones.
How many of those tigers have long ago
snuck back into the primordial ooze?
Leaving us quaking superstitiously,
our bodies still believing they were there?
They're not even alive anymore!
Their bones have long ago turned to dust!

Open your eyes!
Dare to become present!
Embrace yourself!
All of you!
Nothing that is real is forbidden!

We are crossing a boundary now.
Into the Sacred Circle.
Into the cauldron of each other.
The fire is hot - Pay attention!

Listen to the instrument of your body.
The life force is flowing through it.
Find resonance with each other -
Join on that!
Trust the current -
it knows where to go.
The adventure is calling,
the journey has begun,
let's go !

- Michael Robbins

The Protest Voice

We the people
Hear our cry
To protest on behalf of all
So none are passed by

We know the power
Of the old
To Keep out the new
Without a word told

We know the power
Of the fast
To keep out the slow
And render them last

But what of other splits
Between them and us
That lay outside
Our budding awareness

Do we turn our ear
Avert our gaze
Render them invisible
And hope they go away

Is this what we want
Is this our goal
To miss the context
And take up a non-functional role?

Or can we make permeable our boundaries
To make a different choice
Assess the signal to noise ratio
Of the protest voice

What restraining force
Can we lay bare
To access the drive for all
Of justice and care

So hear ye, hear ye,
Listen for the call
On behalf of the group-as-a-whole
For one and for all

- Bonnie Macbride

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