Fall 2013

Teaching Group Dynamics

Tracy Wallach

Teaching Group Dynamics

Tracy Wallach

What is Group Relations?

Theory

Group relations refers to an interdisciplinary field, which integrates psychoanalytic theory, systems theory, and political science (with its attention to power and authority). Its early influences include contributions by sociologists Le Bon and McDougall, psychoanalysts Freud, Klein and Bion, social psychologist Kurt Lewin and anthropologists Rice and Miller (1). The work of British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion (1952, 1961) and his ideas about basic assumption mentality and other aspects of unconscious functioning in groups forms the foundation upon which the field is built. I have previously written about how group relations theory can be applied to understand and work with conflict in and between groups (Wallach, 2004, 2006, 2010, 2012).

A group relations lens allows one to look at group and organizational behavior simultaneously at multiple levels:

- The psychological level: issues of identity, collective narrative, emotions and unconscious processes
- The social level: inter-group relations
- The political level: the role of leadership, authority and power dynamics.
  Emotions in Groups

Working at the Center for Applied Social Research in London's Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, Bion (1961) explored the relationship between the individual and the group. He suggested that membership in any group is inherently conflicted. We long to be a part of something bigger than ourselves, while at the same time, we fear the loss of our individual identity in a group (Bion, 1961; McCollom, 1990). He believed that individual members enter groups with their own rational and non-rational aims and needs, and employ psychosocial defenses(2) such as splitting (3), projection (4), and projective identification (5) in order to tolerate the powerful tensions of group life. The group and its leader become a container for the various projections of individual group members and the group takes on a life of its own as a consequence of these processes. As a result, individual group members act not only on their own behalf, but also on behalf of the larger group or system. These processes make up the unconscious of the group-as-a-whole. The group-as-a-whole becomes an entity much greater than its individual members, with a character of its own (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004). Just as individuals utilize defense mechanisms, such as splitting and projective identification, so do groups, organizations, communities and nations mobilize social defenses to protect themselves against unbearable feelings, unconscious anxieties, and

conflicts (Menzies, 1975; Menzies Lyth, 1997). Groups may also avoid anxiety and other difficult feelings and decisions by substituting routines or rituals for direct engagement with a painful problem. These rituals are defined by the culture in which they are embedded.

Work Groups

Groups tend to join together based on similarities and in order to pursue a common task. The primary task of any group is its raison d'être—its purpose. To accomplish a group's task, members must differentiate, by taking on different roles in service of the larger group task. Often, differences in skill, viewpoint, or values are also necessary to achieve a group's primary task. Boundaries are formed or created around a group and its subsystems, task, and roles to define what belongs to the group and what is to be excluded. Leadership is assigned to those most able to help a group achieve its primary task (Miller, 1989; Miller & Rice, 1975; Zagier Roberts, 1994) Bion (1961) referred to the above described overt and conscious level of group functioning as the work group.

The concepts of task, role, boundary, and authority help us to understand the overt and covert dynamics of groups and systems. When these structural elements are agreed upon and in alignment with each other, groups and systems may function relatively well. Conflict and dysfunction can arise when there is disagreement, spoken or unspoken, or when task, role, boundaries, and authority are not in alignment. It should be noted that notions of task, role, boundary and authority are also culture-bound. Lack of alignment and conflict may be due to different interpretations rooted in cultural expectations and differences.

Basic Assumption Groups

A group that is facing uncertainty, conflict or anxiety may unconsciously find covert ways of containing or managing the difficult emotions. For example, groups may use particular members or subgroups to contain a difficult emotion, thought, or point of view on behalf of the group as a whole. That is, an individual group member, a pair, or a sub-group may be compelled, through the processes of projective identification, to take up a role to meet the group's unconscious needs. Demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and physical characteristics, may serve as the basis for which certain members are ascribed particular roles (Berg & Smith, 1987; Horwitz, 1983; McRae & Short, 2010; Reed & Noumair, 2000). For example, women, based on cultural expectations, may be asked to take on caretaking roles on behalf of the larger group, or to give voice to emotions in the group. Members of a marginalized ethnic group in a society may be compelled to contain certain characteristics (such as aggression or sexuality) deemed undesirable or intolerable by a dominant ethnic group. Sometimes, these projections get translated into policy or law (Skolnick & Green, 2006).

The group as a whole can maintain its equilibrium, as long as it can view "the problem" as located in one individual or subgroup. Groups which operate largely unconsciously, and in

seeming opposition to their stated primary task are said to be operating under basic assumption mentality (Banet & Hayden, 1977; Bion, 1961; Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004; Lawrence, Bain, & Gould, 1996; Miller, 1989; Rioch, 1975). Basic assumption groups assign leadership to those most able to help the group meet its unconscious survival needs and contain its anxiety. Basic assumption leaders collude with the group in avoiding reality, and may be extruded or replaced if they break this unconscious agreement. Bion described three kinds of basic assumptions in groups: dependency, fight/flight and pairing. Others have proposed two other types of basic assumptions: oneness (Turquet, 1985) and me-ness (Lawrence, et al., 1996). Basic assumption groups are described at length elsewhere (Banet & Hayden, 1977; Bion, 1961; Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004; Lawrence, et al., 1996; Miller, 1989; Rioch, 1975).

Basic assumption mentality simplifies what is complex, and allows a group to manage anxiety and internal conflict without actually addressing the reality at hand. Groups that are invested in maintaining a particular view of themselves (their group identity) and of other groups can exert pressure on its members to behave according to group norms/expectations as a way of keeping them "in line." Speaking against predominating group norms may carry the risk of being scapegoated.

Group Relations Conference Methods

Group relations conferences offer a unique kind of experiential learning in which participants can explore and learn about issues of power and leadership, and the conscious and unconscious processes that influence the exercise of authority in groups. Each group relations conference becomes a "temporary institution," designed to replicate many of the psychodynamic and structural characteristics of organizational and community life: task systems, authority structures, boundaries of task, role, time and territory. The temporary organization of the conference system provides the opportunity to learn experientially about the exercise of authority and leadership, and about group dynamics, as they unfold in real time (6). Working within this temporary organization, members learn how it functions, how they function in it, and then examine how this experiential learning can be applied to their individual work settings (7).

The word "conference" can be misleading and evoke the image of traditional academic or professional meetings in which expert faculty or speakers lecture or actively facilitate sessions, while the audience passively takes in information. In contrast, a group relations conference is structured in a way that encourages participants to assert authority by bringing in their own experience and knowledge. Both participants and staff are "participant observers" who work together to make meaning of the temporary organization/system that they are co-creating (Banet & Hayden, 1977; Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004; Miller, 1989).

Typically, group relations conferences consist of five types of events. Three of these, small study groups, large study groups and the institutional event are "here and now" events. This means that the purpose is for participants (with the assistance of one or more consultants) to study their own experience and behavior as it occurs in real time. A small study group (SSG) will consist of eight to twelve members and one or two consultants. The large study group (LSG) consists of all of the conference participants and three to four consultants, traditionally seated in a spiral configuration where participants cannot have face-to-face contact with everyone in the room. In this kind of arrangement, crowd dynamics may be elicited and studied. In the institutional event, members choose their own groups, whose task is to study not only their own experience and behavior, but also the relations between the groups and the dynamics of the whole institution. Staff members may take up a variety of management or consulting roles in these sessions (Banet & Hayden, 1977; Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004; Miller, 1989).

In addition to the "here and now" events described above, traditional group relations conferences also have two kinds of reflective events: plenary sessions and review and application groups (RAGs—sometimes referred to as role analysis groups). Review and application groups consist of four to eight participants to first examine the roles they are taking and being given within the conference experience. Later on in the conference these sessions move toward focusing on what is being learned and how it may apply to their roles and organizations at home (Banet & Hayden, 1977; Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004; Miller, 1989).

The role of the staff is to encourage and support participant awareness, analysis, reflection, and understanding of the emerging conference dynamics. Staff consultants take an interpretive stance and attempt to offer hypotheses about conference dynamics in the moment. Interpretations are offered in response to the dynamic interplay between staff and participants. They make use of conference participants' observations, thoughts, behaviors, associations, metaphors, fantasies, dreams, etc. as evidence to support their hypotheses, and also use their own experiences in the moment as data. Participants are free to work with these hypotheses, discard them, or offer their own.

Conferences have a clear authority structure, with clear boundaries around time, task, and roles. At the same time, there is no pre-determined outcome or action agenda, as this is determined by conference participants and unfolds in the course of their work together. The assumption is that the conference serves as a microcosm of the external environment, so that by examining their behaviors and experiences within the "here and now" experience of the conference setting, participants will gain insight into the dynamics of the systems in which they work and live: at home, in the workplace and in their communities (Banet & Hayden, 1977; Hayden & Molenkamp, 2004; Miller, 1989) (8). The dynamics that emerge within any particular group are influenced by the larger system and environment within which the group is embedded. Individuals are members of multiple groups: identity, work, organizational, professional, cultural, etc. By virtue of their outside identity group memberships, group

members import assumptions, values and beliefs from the larger environment (Berg and Smith, 1987). Examining the dynamics in the microcosm of the conference can elucidate processes in the society at large (Alford, 2004).

Critique of the Model

During the last ten years, I've served on staff of a dozen group relations conferences and participated as a member in a dozen more, both in the US and overseas. Conferences share similar structures, and some offer innovations on the structure (Braxton, Hayden, McRae, & Monroe, 2008). The theory and method have greatly influenced my thinking and my teaching. At the same time, as a result of these experiences and conducting formal evaluations of three different conferences (Wallach, 2008, 2009, 2012) I am also aware of flaws in the model.

Briefly, these are connected to:

- Consulting stance: consultants do not "facilitate" or lead a group. This is not a problem in itself, as it enables participants very early on to address their expectations of authority. In a more traditional conference, the consulting stance can feel like a caricature: the consultant stares at the ground, saying nothing, save for periodic interpretations that seem to emanate from the Oracle at Delphi. They may not respond when participants question them about their meaning (9). This has left some participants feeling confused and unclear about what they learned. In some cultures, this would be deeply insulting. Many involved in group relations agree that this kind of experience "isn't for everyone," and my research bore that out (Wallach, 2008). I would argue, however, that there may be ways to make the conference appealing, useful and culturally appropriate to a broader array of participants. Consultants need not give up their humanity in order to draw attention to unconscious processes in groups. Nor do they need to provide all of the answers in the form of neatly arranged interpretations. Respondents to surveys suggested that there may be relatively simple ways to make this kind of experience more palatable for those not accustomed to learning in this format. Several respondents proposed that some kind of orientation to the model and the language, either prior to the start of the conference or during the first day, might have been helpful to their learning. Indeed, early on in the history of "Tavistock" conferences, lectures were part of the conference format. Over time, conference designs included fewer of these elements in favor of more experiential events (Miller, 1989). Reducing some of the mystery around the conference model and language may enhance participants' learning experiences.
- Tendency of group relations organizations to act like closed systems and be self-referential: in all of the evaluations I conducted, there was a tendency, for experienced consultants and members alike, to re-create (through their consultations and interpretations) conference dynamics that they expect to occur. In this way, group relations culture gets reproduced. Consultants may rely on tried and true interpretations, rather than addressing the actual dynamic in the here and now. For example, since

conference staff are strict around time, task, and role boundaries, lateness of any type can be interpreted as an "attack on management." Since time boundaries are culture-bound, this interpretation can be especially problematic in non-Western cultures. In each of the conferences I evaluated, the dynamics of the sponsoring organization and the group relations world were salient throughout the conference (manifesting in the kinds of groups formed during the Institutional Events, and how they identified themselves). This occurred despite the fact that the majority of participants had never attended a conference before and were not familiar with the sponsoring organization.

- Individual vs. systemic nature of conference learning: My research suggested that conference learning is variable and highly individualized. This is both a strength and a weakness of the model. Though the theory and method are about systems, participants in research I conducted report that their learning was more personal than systemic (Wallach, 2008, 2009, 2012). What is actually learned/goals/outcomes can be amorphous and difficult to describe. While there is generally little follow-up with participants after conferences, my research showed that conference learning might be increased with follow up after the conference ends (such as application groups).

United States

In the United States I taught: applied group dynamics to human services undergraduates in a private university; leadership and authority to graduate law and social work students, and organizational behavior to undergraduate business students—all from a Group Relations perspective.

For the past five years, I've taught a section of the introductory organizational behavior class for undergraduates in the College of Management at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. U Mass is a large urban university of nearly 16,000 undergraduate and graduate students. It has the second largest campus in the state university system. The commuter school draws many non-traditional students, and is highly diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, nationality, race, gender, socio-economic status, and work and life experience. Many students work part or full-time to support their studies, and many also have family responsibilities.

Social work and human service students are generally more comfortable with experiential learning, so I have convened small study groups as part of the class structure. Business students have been less patient with the "here and now" approach. Many have questioned why feelings matter in a business setting. In my first year of teaching at the college of management I was immediately confronted with the difference in professional cultures, as well as national cultures. I have since re-shaped the course to present theory in a series of short, one-session experiential exercises followed by an extended exercise over five sessions. This has helped to acclimatize the students to experiential learning, as well as to demonstrate theoretical concepts of task, role, boundaries, leadership, defense mechanisms, etc. We also speak more explicitly about the ways that cultural differences may influence one's approach to authority (as one example).

An introductory exercise I've used with most groups is a variation of the "Warped Juggle" exercise (Booth Sweeney & Meadows, 1995), which is well known in organizational development circles. This is an exercise in group problem solving and thinking outside the box. The stated task is for everyone in the group to "have contact" with a ball in the same order. The exercise begins when the facilitator tosses the ball to a participant across the room. The phrasing of this instruction is quite deliberate, leaving open to interpretation what "having contact" means, and blurring the task boundary. Since I begin by tossing the ball, the participants follow suit, even though the stated instructions were to "have contact with the ball in the same order." Once the order is remembered, I step out of the circle, and act as "manager" while I time their efforts. The exercise gets more complex as I throw in more balls or other objects into the circle, while asking them to cut their time in half with each try. Initially, groups may be befuddled. But one or two members usually step up and ask me whether it's ok to change the order in which they are standing. I usually answer with a vague shrug, which most groups understand to mean that they are free to do as they want. Once that first step is made, groups figure out quickly how they can cut back their time further (first doing the activity in the same way, but faster; then standing in order and passing the balls; until finally they leave the objects in one place while participants stand close to touch them). Participants normally solve the problem within five minutes. The exercise is then debriefed to explore particular concepts: how did the group understand its task? Who took up leadership in the group? What other roles did people take up? Whose suggestions were followed or ignored? Why? What kept participants from taking up their authority in the group when they had ideas to offer? What is the role of identity (gender, race, class, ethnicity, etc.) in who is given and who takes authority? In this way, a relatively simple exercise can lead to a very rich discussion of group dynamics.

In the organizational behavior class I begin with the Warped Juggle exercise. Over the next 4 weeks, I increase the complexity of the exercises, which culminates in a five-week "organizational simulation." In this exercise, students are first given the task of forming groups "to offer a product or service to the university community." Their second task is to study their dynamics as they work, using group relations theory. The exercise concludes with group presentations to demonstrate how they've applied the concepts to understand their own process.

Palestine

I have been travelling to the region since 1973, and lived in Jerusalem for a total of three years between 1974 and 1981, first with Zionist youth groups, and later as a college student and recent graduate. At that time in my life, my Jewish identity was still very intertwined with Zionism. It took me a number of years to disentangle the two.

In 2012, I traveled to Palestine to teach at Al Quds University. I have been working with some people about using group relations in the Palestinian context, as a way of facilitating

collaboration within the university, and between the university and the larger Palestinian society (for instance, the local community where the school is located, other universities, NGOs, etc.). We viewed this trip as an opportunity for me to get a "lay of the land," to introduce this kind of work to faculty and students, and to gage potential interest in group relations work.

Al Quds University is the only university for Palestinian students in Jerusalem. It was founded in 1995 when several independent colleges focusing on different disciplines were combined into a single institution. The school has over 13,000 students on its three campuses in Jerusalem: in Abu Dies (in Palestinian controlled territory), Beit Hanina and Hind al-Husseini College (both in Israeli controlled Jerusalem). Very few students have the luxury of being able to focus entirely on study. Most have family and outside work responsibilities. Students commute from Hebron, Nablus, Jerusalem and other cities and towns throughout the West Bank. Tuition rates cover only 60 percent of actual operating costs of the university. Still, 68 percent of Al-Quds students cannot afford to pay more than half of the lowered rate. The school is committed to admitting all qualified students, regardless of their ability to pay (10). The separation wall (built on Palestinian territory) has cut the campus in half, so that faculty residing in the West Bank who once taught on both campuses, are now limited to teaching at the Abu Dies campus, on the Palestinian side of the wall.

Abu Dies campus (Palestinian controlled territory)

Abu Dies campus (Palestinian controlled territory)

View of separation wall from building on Abu Dies campus

Beit Hannina campus (Israeli controlled territory)

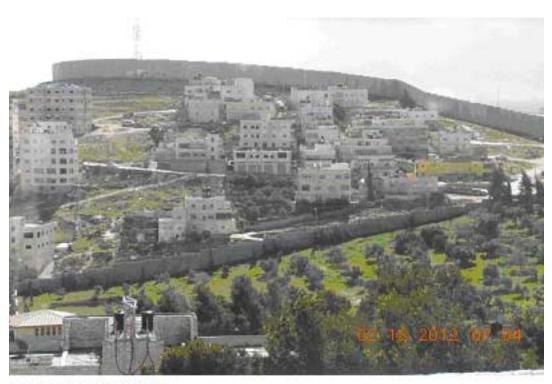Hind Al-Husseini college campus (Israeli controlled territory)

The political situation has taken a toll on Palestinian society and its institutions (including educational institutions). Circumstances continue to worsen for Palestinians in the occupied territories, despite the initial exhilaration following the 1993 Oslo Accords. When the territory was first conquered by Israel in 1967, there was relative freedom of movement, which has

become increasingly restricted over the years. Israeli Jewish settlements have been built up throughout the West Bank, essentially cutting the territory into pieces. Checkpoints make travel over short distances cumbersome at best. The Israeli government has built settlement roads that criss-cross the West Bank, connecting settlements to each other and to Israel proper. Palestinians are not permitted to travel on these roads (unless they have Israeli citizenship). The Palestinian roads are narrower, windier, longer, and more dangerous. The day I arrived in Palestine, there had been an accident where a busload of schoolchildren had overturned. Eleven children were killed (11).

All Palestinians residing in the West Bank require a permit in order to enter East Jerusalem (annexed by Israel) or other parts of Israel. These permits are increasingly difficult to obtain. Palestinian homes are demolished for being illegally built, while Palestinians are often denied building permits. In East Jerusalem, Palestinians continue to be evicted from their homes, replaced by Jewish settlers, in the effort to create a greater "Judaized" Jerusalem. This process would be complete if the Israelis follow through on their promise to build in the E1 section, effectively cutting off Jerusalem from the West Bank (12).

Retrieved 11/17/12 from http://www.darkmoon.me/2012/the-land-grabbers-strike-again-by-rehmat/

The separation wall

Planning at the school can be difficult, as the university may be subject to closure by the Israeli authorities, as well as student and faculty strikes. Students from Hebron can be delayed or prevented from coming to the campus in the winter, due to the particularly dangerous road conditions along that route. During the two weeks I was there, there were four strikes lasting a day or two: three by students and one by faculty (who, for each of the past two years, were being paid only 80% of their salary) (13) . Students face other challenges as well.

February 2012 marked one of the coldest and rainiest winters on record in Palestine. Since the university guest house on campus had no central heating, I stayed in a modest hotel in Al-Bireh (adjacent to Ramallah, a small city of just over 300,000 and the de facto capital of the Palestinian National Authority) (14). When I lived in Jerusalem in the late 1970s, it took about ten minutes to drive the six miles to Ramallah. Now, the drive from Ramallah to Abu Dies is at least forty minutes via Palestinian roads on public transportation. Public transportation consists of yellow taxis or mini-busses, which stop along particular routes, picking up and dropping off passengers as a bus would. Since drivers are paid by the number of trips they make, speeding is commonplace, making the morning and evening commutes harrowing expeditions. Each morning I would wait outside my hotel for one of my hosts to pick me up in a taxi. More than once, I asked my host to request that the driver slow down. She would do so, explaining to the driver that I was afraid. She and others acknowledged that they were also frightened at times, but declared that the drivers would not listen to them or might make fun of them for being afraid.

One of the roads leading up to the Abu Dies campus

The College of Health Professions hosted me during my two-week stay. I had met three faculty members in December 2011, when they came to Boston for training. I was rarely left alone as faculty members accompanied me on my commute every morning, invited me to their homes for meals, and gave me gifts of Palestinian embroidery and other handicrafts (as did some complete strangers). Their generosity was overwhelming.

Over the course of two weeks, I taught several half-day introductory workshops to students in various departments in the College of Health Professions. Workshops had between 12 and 50 participants. I spent four days in the School of Nursing, where there was some overlap in students from day to day. In addition, I gave workshops in the Medical School, Medical Technology Department, and the Insan Center for Gender Studies. The nursing students were predominantly female, while the other groups were more balanced in terms of gender. I also met individually with some faculty members to learn more about the daily challenges they faced.

There was some variation, but the basic workshop I taught had two components, beginning with the "Warped Juggle" exercise, described previously. As noted earlier, groups I've worked with in the U.S. typically take one to two minutes to begin to re-think the task. For each group that I worked with in Palestine, the groups took twenty minutes or more to complete the task, and then only after significant coaching on my part. This was particularly striking to me, as it happened with every group I worked with in Palestine. At first, I did not know what to make of the phenomenon. After some thought, I interpreted it as a function of life under

occupation. In group relations theory, the small group is viewed as a microcosm of the larger environment (Alford, 2004).

Palestinians must submit to Israeli authorities on a daily basis: they must show identification papers when asked, and are subject to administrative detention (arrest without indictment or trial) for extended periods (months or years), and over the years, thousands have been held in Israeli custody (15). Under such circumstances, one needs to be strategic when questioning authority, as the penalties can be dire. While the consequences of challenging the status quo are not so dire in the Warped Juggle, the exercise does require that participants challenge authority (the directions they are given), and take up their own authority to come up with solutions to the problem. Whereas with other groups, one or two people will soon ask me whether the group needs to stand in the same order, no one did in this case. I intervened several times to tell the group that they might need to re-think how they understand the task. It was only after several such interventions that they made the necessary changes in order to complete the task.

Public Health Management students doing Warped Juggle exercise

Students at the Insan Gender Center doing Warped Juggle exercise

Nursing students doing role analysis exercise

Nursing students doing role analysis

After the Warped Juggle exercise, I invited the class to divide into small groups to create a skit that would illustrate particular organizational problems they were facing (16). The skits were complex and illustrated real problems, such as corruption, dealing with colleagues who were slacking off (but who had connections with higher-ups), drug abuse, etc. After each skit, we discussed how participants might behave differently to get a different outcome. Initially, there was a sense of powerlessness and fatalism about the problems depicted in the skits: "that's just the way it is." (17) But as the discussion continued, students began to suggest possibilities to take action. This is described further below.

With the nursing groups that I taught in the first four days, there was some unexpected overlap in attendance. After consulting with the class about the dilemma this presented in the workshop design, we agreed that we would use the same design, but those that had already attended the workshop would act as observers during the Warped Juggle exercise. In addition, they would come up with a new skit, and take it to a deeper level. Their skit was particularly memorable. They presented both a difficult situation and its resolution. They enacted a situation in which a supervisor protected a colleague (to whom she was related) whose negligent behavior was endangering patients. Two days earlier, this group presented the situation with resignation, and could not see a way out of it. In this skit, they portrayed themselves sticking together as a group challenging the supervisor, and going above her until they got results. As an educator, it is always gratifying to see students learn. I was particularly impressed by how students used the workshop to empower themselves to take up their own authority, and think about how to take action in more effective ways.

With the nurses and one other small group I facilitated a role analysis exercise (a variation of role biography (Long, 2006)). In this exercise, I asked the nurses to divide a piece of flipchart paper into three and draw a picture of themselves in role in three different places in their

lives: with their families, at the university, and in their internships. Then, in groups of four, the students would discuss each drawing in turn. The subject of the drawing was asked to be silent for a few minutes while the rest of the group used free association to respond to what was in the picture. Then the subject could describe his or her experience. Students drew pictures depicting their multiple responsibilities, often carried out without support. Many students played a caretaking role in their own families of origin, caring for physically disabled parents or siblings or both. Some were the sole earners in their families. All of the students and faculty are touched in some way by the political situation: everyone has to deal with the restriction of movement and checkpoints; everyone knows someone who has been killed or administratively detained, or had their home demolished, whether family member or friend. As helping professionals (and trainees) students and faculty deal with multiple layers of trauma: on personal, community and professional levels. We discussed the importance of them being able to rely on each other (and hold each other accountable), given the daily stresses arising from both the nature of their work, as well as their family and environment issues. Despite all of these levels of trauma, they remain surprisingly resilient and open to learning.

While those who coordinated my schedule in Palestine knew I was Jewish, No one commented to me about it.(18) I was treated as an honored guest by all whom I encountered. I had more difficulty with Israeli security as I left the country to go to Turkey. My bags were x-rayed, and every article was examined by hand. After a two hour interrogation, I was allowed to board the plane, though without my carry-on bag (which had to be emptied and checked-in to the same flight) or my iPad keyboard (which was to be sent on a later flight). This kind of treatment is routine for Palestinians, activists, non-whites and other travelers who spend time in the Palestinian territories.(19)

Turkey

The idea for Sabanci University was born in 1994 when the Sabancı Group decided to establish a "world university" led by the Sabancı Foundation. During the summer of 1995, the Foundation conducted a search conference in which 50 academics from 22 countries as well as students and representatives from the private sector participated. Officially established in 1996, students began enrolling in 1999. The school is interdisciplinary and department-free by design. The newly built campus is located an hour outside of Istanbul: it has modern buildings with spacious and well equipped classrooms, a state of the art sports center, a performing arts center, restaurants, dormitories for students, as well as faculty and staff, and an information center/library (20). The campus has the feel of a commuter school on weekends, when many students go home to their families in Istanbul.

A view of student dormitories at Sabanci University

I was hired by the school to teach a five-day one credit course to students in the Masters in Conflict Resolution Program. I had spoken with the dean of the program about teaching there the previous summer, but for logistical reasons, it didn't happen. When I learned the dates for my Palestine trip, I checked in again, and we were able to make the course happen. Rather than deliver a series of workshops to many different groups, here I was contracted to deliver a one-credit course in group dynamics to eight students (six women and two men) studying for their Masters degrees in Conflict Resolution. A driver met me at the airport by for the journey to Sabanci University. As snow fell, we coasted smoothly on the well-maintained highway.

Since I had the luxury of working with the same small group for 15 hours over five days (three hours a day), I structured the course differently than the others. Students were assigned reading to be completed prior to the beginning of class. I started off similarly to the way I begin classes in the U.S., with exercises to ease the group into experiential learning. I began with the Warped Juggle (described earlier), which the group solved quickly (as groups I've worked with in the U.S. have done). Next, I gave them a group puzzle (Escher Lizards), in which each member was given a card describing a piece of the task. For the majority, the card read: "take one of the pieces. Only you may touch this piece." Three participants got six cards

that described what the final product should look like (it is a puzzle, all 15 pieces must be used, there should be no holes or spaces in the puzzle; it is a triangle; the sides are equal in length, similar colors may not touch each other). All cards said "you may not show your card to anyone." The puzzle highlights basic concepts in group relations theory (boundaries, authority, role and task). How students interpret the directive (to not show their card to anyone) can lead in to a discussion about authority. Must it be taken literally? It also highlights communication issues. When I've used this exercise in the U.S., I noticed differences based on professional culture. For instance, an engineering or high tech group might put together the puzzle very quickly without speaking at all. A group of law students not only didn't show their cards, they were quite active in hiding their cards from the other students (reflecting the school's competitive culture). A group of professional social workers communicated very openly about what was on their cards, but put together a misshapen puzzle (saying it was a "good enough triangle"). This group of students in conflict resolution communicated a great deal during the exercise, and succeeded in completing the puzzle well within the 20 minute time frame.

At the beginning of the second day, I led the group through a guided meditation to explore their multiple identities (such as ethnicity, class, gender, religion, role, etc.) (21). This is an exercise that I conduct with my business students around week four of a thirteen week semester. As the group appeared to me to be homogeneous, I was not sure how it would work in this context. Participants are asked to name eight to ten identities and order them from most to least important. I do not define identity for them, and students may define their identities in different ways: roles as family members or students, personality attributes, age, gender, class, and ethnicity. I ask them to consider each identity in turn. The debrief allows participants to consider how they take up their various identities, how some identities may determine how others relate to them. For this group, their role identity as students was salient. Ethnicity came up for the two non-Turks in the group.

Because I had a small group, the structure for the remaining two and a half days of class consisted of small study groups and review and application/role analysis groups. The task of the first is to study the processes of the group as it occurs in the here and now (similar to a group relations conference). Each day ended with review and application or role analysis, which gave students the opportunity to debrief the here-and-now experiential portion, including asking me about my interventions, to examine the kinds of roles they took up in the group, and to relate it to the kinds of roles they take up in their lives outside of class. As is typical in group relations work, the group struggled with this way of working.

Working in the "here and now" is not easy, and first time small group members invariably stray to the "there and then." The consultant seeks to discover if these communications about what is going on outside of the room might also pertain to what is happening in the moment inside the room. The students struggled with my role as consultant (as is typical in a first small study group). Since the consultant does not actively facilitate or lecture, as many

are accustomed to, group members are then faced with their own expectations of and feelings about authority figures. We debriefed their experiences during the review and application session, during which time, I would answer any questions they had about the process, including why I intervened the way I did. Towards the end of one of the small study group sessions one day, the group continued to try to understand my role as a consultant, and then went on a tangent about the Eurovision song contest. They tried to figure out whether the Turkish contestant was Jewish or Armenian or both. Since the group knew that I had come to Turkey by way of Israel, I wondered if this tangent might be an unconscious manifestation of the group working with my Jewish identity.

As a rule I try not to be too provocative at the end of a session, but in this case I decided to say that I wondered whether their focus on the Eurovision contestant and their pre-occupation with and confusion about his identity was connected to their experiences of me as a Jewish consultant. The group responded with shock, "You're Jewish? Really?" I replied affirmatively, but having hit a time boundary, we needed to stop. After a five minute break, we re-convened for a review and application session. Group members continued to express their surprise at my revelation, and wondered why I had brought it up, while at the same time denying its importance. I acknowledged that it may not have been important for them. However, they spent the remainder of the class discussing how un-important my being Jewish was. The issue came up again in later sessions (one member teased another member in an off-hand manner at one point that she "didn't like Jews"). These discussions seemed to challenge their assumptions about identity. That this was such a pre-occupation with students may be connected to the fact that Turkey-Israel relations were at its nadir at this time (and that Israel, Zionism, and Judaism are often conflated and confused).

Turkey recognized Israel in 1949, and relations between the two countries have had some ups and downs. It peaked in the late 1990s with the development of a strategic alliance between Israel, and the Turkish military leadership (and included joint military exercises). Relations have been on the decline since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Prime Minister Erdogan came into power in 2002. The Prime Minister has endeavored to decrease the military's influence on foreign policy. The relationship soured further following the closure (in the late 2000's) and later attacks on Gaza (Operation Cast Lead in 2008-09) and the attacks on the Turkish ship Mavi Mamara, which was participating in a flotilla to break the siege of Gaza (22). The relationship has improved since President Obama facilitated an apology from the Israeli Prime Minister to the Turkish one.

Conclusion

The U.K., the U.S., Australia, Israel, Argentina, Peru, India, and South Africa, as well as many countries across Europe have group relations organizations that regularly convene group relations conferences. One of the strengths of the model is that it has been used in many different cultures. Participants in classes and conferences import their attitudes and beliefs

(as they are molded by their identities, personalities, cultures, experiences and contexts). In this way, one can learn a great deal about the broader socio-economic contexts even while focusing only on what is occurring in the room. The focus on covert processes can help to make visible the underlying issues of the broader context, whether related to politics, culture (organizational, professional and national cultures) or identity. In the Palestinian setting, the dynamics of societal trauma appeared in the workshop setting. In Turkey, this work challenged some of the students' assumptions about identity and brought to light some of the politics related to identity. In the U.S., the dynamics of professional culture were brought to life. It is worth noting, however, that the model has been used primarily in Western cultures, with the exception of India and South Africa (both former British colonies), and more recently with indigenous people in Peru. The model needs some adjustment to be sensitive to the contexts and cultures in which it is being used.

End Notes

(1) For more about the history of the development of group relations as a field, see Fraher (2004).

(2) Defense mechanisms offer a way to manage internal conflict and the anxiety it arouses. Just as countries develop various kinds of defenses and weaponry to protect themselves from perceived enemies, so, too, do individuals try to protect themselves from perceived dangers. Defense mechanisms and how they manifest on the individual and group level have been written about extensively in the psychoanalytic and group relations literature. See, for example, (Bion, 1961; A. Freud, 1966; S. Freud, 1959a, 1959b; Klein, 1959; Obholzer & Zagier Roberts, 1994a, 1994b; Ogden, 1982).

(3) Splitting is a defensive process in which we gain relief from internal conflicts by dividing emotions into either "all good" or "all bad" parts. We split our emotions due to our difficulty in holding two paradoxical experiences at the same time. Containing both the good and the bad parts of ourselves and seeing others as containing both good and bad aspects presents an intolerable conflict. We split in order to protect ourselves from the anxiety that the conflict arouses.

(4) Projection is a defense in which an individual disowns, and, then offloads onto someone else the disowned (split off) feelings s/he is experiencing. Whether the feelings are objectively 'good' or 'bad', the individual experiences them as intolerable. Projection is often seen in conjunction with splitting, with the split-off aspects of the self then projected onto another party because of the induced anxiety of holding onto the feelings oneself. Splitting and projective processes allow an internal conflict to be externalized and located outside the self (e.g., we are good, they are evil; we are rational, they are emotional; we are victims, they are perpetrators; we are peace loving, they are aggressive; we are heroes, they are cowards, etc.). Thus, the complex and ambiguous is made to seem simple and clear.

(5) Projective identification is a collusive process between two or more parties. In this process, once the projector has offloaded his intolerable feelings onto another, the recipient of the projection identifies with and internalizes the projected feelings as his own. The target of the projection thus changes in response to the projected feeling or impulse. The projector can manipulate or train an individual or group to act according to his projections by himself impulse. The projector can manipulate or train an individual or group to act according to his projections by himself behaving as if those projections are true. The "projector" needs to stay in contact with the recipient in order to maintain a connection to the disowned, projected feelings (Horwitz, 1983).

(6) A full description of the conference experience can be found in Rice (1963), Banet and Hayden (1977); Hayden and Molenkamp (2003); and Miller (1989).

(7) Information obtained from AKRI's website www.akriceinstitute.org.

(8) This phenomenon has also been referred to as isomorphy (Agazarian & Philibossian, 1988).

(9) It should be noted that not all consultants take up the role in the same way. How one takes up the consulting role may be influenced by a number of factors, including gender, ethnicity, professional training and group relations mentoring, among others.

(10) (retrieved 1/7/13 from http://www.alquds.edu/en/students/financial-aid/who-are.html).

(11) More information is available at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-17057579 There were an estimated 86.5 car fatalities (per 100,000 vehicles) in the Palestinian Territories in the latest reported year, vs. 14.3 (per 100,000 vehicles) in Israel. Retrieved 1/14/13 from : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_traffic-related_death_rate#cite_note-WHO2009-2

(12) Evictions and home demolitions, as well as other human rights abuses are documented extensively by Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem (http://www.btselem.org); by Palestinian human rights organization Al Haq (http://www.alhaq.org) and Just Vision (http://www.justvision.org/myneighbourhood) among others.

(13) As this paper is being revised for publication on May 30, 2013, faculty and staff have been on strike for the better part of the last three months. The Palestinian Authority, which pays their salary, is dealing with the worst economic crisis in years (personal communication from faculty member).

(14) Retrieved 1/10/13 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramallah

(15) While I was there, one Palestinian prisoner was ending a sixty-six day hunger strike in protest of his administrative detention. Other prisoners joined him and in April, there was a mass hunger strike of 1600 to 2000 prisoners, which ended 28 days later. Retrieved 1/10/13 from http://www.btselem.org/topic/administrative_detention

(16) The nursing students were doing internships, sometimes in addition to regular jobs; and students in the other programs were working professionals.

(17) At the same time, students (and faculty) exercised great power when they succeeded in shutting down the university a total of four times in the two weeks I was there. The dynamic interplay of fatalism and resistance seems to replicate Palestinian response to the Israeli occupation. On a daily basis Palestinians submit to Israeli authority (showing their identity cards on demand, passing through checkpoints), while there are moments of powerful resistance (demonstrations, prisoner hunger strikes, etc.).

(18) The one time it did arise was while I was in the Old City of Jerusalem with a colleague, and as we passed a church, she asked me if I wanted to pray. I said I was Jewish—was she aware of it? She said she wasn't but that it didn't make any difference to her. I suspected that it was more an issue for me, feeling it necessary to explain that I was Jewish, not Zionist. Palestinians seem better able to differentiate the two than many are in the American context.

(19) This has been documented in numerous places, such as :http://mondoweiss.net/2010/03/what-it-means-to-go-to-ben-gurion-airport-with-an-arab-friend.html ; http://mondoweiss.net/2011/07/ben-gurion-airport-showcases-the-normalisation-of-apartheid-in-israelpalestine.html ; http://electronicintifada.net/content/israel-denied-me-entry-basis-my-skin-color-and-religion/11536 ; http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/israel-blocks-200-pro-palestinian-activists-from-flying-into-country-1.372139 ; http://mondoweiss.net/2012/06/do-you-feel-more-arab-or-more-american-two-arab-american-womens-story-of-being-detained-and-interrogated-at-ben-gurion.html http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/07/08/pro-palestinian-airborne-protest-blocked-israel-_n_893398.html http://www.guernicamag.com/daily/randa-jarrar-imagining-myself-in-palestine/ http://electronicintifada.net/content/ben-gurion-or-hell/7074.

(20) Retrieved 12/12/12 from Sabanci University website http://www.sabanciuniv.edu/en

(21) Zachary Green, Ph.D. generously shared this exercise with me.

(22) Retrieved 1/28/13 from: http://www.economist.com/node/21528687 and http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/01/can-israels-new-coalition-fix-relations-with-turkey/272582/

References

Agazarian, Y., & Philibossian, P. (1988). A theory of living human systems as an approach to leadership of the future with examples of how it works. In E. B. Klein, F. Gabelnick & P. Herr (Eds.), *The psychodynamics of leadership* (pp. 127-160). Madison, CT: Psychosocial Press.

Alford, C. F. (2004). Small groups and big nations: Politics and leadership from the perspective of the small study group. In S. Cytrynbaum & D. Noumair (Eds.), *Group dynamics, organizational irrationality, and social complexity: Group relations reader 3* (Vol. 3, pp. 5-22). Jupiter, Florida: The A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems.

Banet, A. G., & Hayden, C. (1977). A Tavistock Primer. In J. E. Jones & J. W. Pfeiffer (Eds.), *The 1977 Annual Handbook for Group Facilitators*. La Jolla, CA: University Associates, Inc.

Berg, D. N., & Smith, K. K. (1987). *Paradoxes of group life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bion, W. R. (1952). Group dynamics: A re-view. In S. Scheidlinger (Ed.), *Psychoanalytic group dynamics: Basic readings*. New York: International Universities Press.

Bion, W. R. (1961). *Experiences in groups*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.

Booth Sweeney, L., & Meadows, B. (1995). *The systems thinking playbook: Exercises to stretch and build learning and systems thinking capabilities.*

Braxton, E. T., Hayden, C., McRae, M., & Monroe, T. (2008). *Current innovations in group relations conferences. Paper presented at the Leadership Across the Globe: Transforming Organizations and Relationships*, AKRI Symposium.

Fraher, A. L. (2004). Systems psychodynamics: The formative years (1895-1967). *Organizational and Social Dynamics, 4(2)*, 191-211.

Freud, A. (1966). *The ego and the mechanisms of defense (Revised ed.)*. New York: International Universities Press.

Freud, S. (1959a). *Inhibitions, symptoms, and anxiety*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Freud, S. (1959b). The unconscious (J. Riviere, Trans.). In J. Riviere (Ed.), *Sigmund Freud collected papers* (Vol. 4, pp. 98-136). New York: Basic Books.

Hayden, C., & Molenkamp, R. (2004). The Tavistock primer II. In S. Cytrynbaum & D. Noumair (Eds.), *Group dynamics, organizational irrationality, and social complexity: Group relations reader 3* (pp. 135-158). Jupiter, FL: The A.K. Rice Institute.

Horwitz, L. (1983). Projective identification in dyads and groups. In A. D. Colman & M. H. Geller (Eds.), *Group relations reader 2* (pp. 21-36). Jupiter, FL: The A.K. Rice Institute.

Klein, M. (1959). *Our adult world and its roots in infancy Envy and gratitude and other works 1946-1963* (pp. 247-263). New York: Free Press.

Lawrence, G., Bain, A., & Gould, L. J. (1996). The fifth basic assumption. *Free Associations, 6(37)*.

Long, S. (2006). Drawing from role biography in Organizational Role Analysis. In J. Newton, S.

Long & B. Sievers (Eds.), *Coaching in depth: The organizational role analysis approach* (pp. 127-144). London: Karnac Books.

McCollom, M. (1990). Group formation: Boundaries, leadership and culture. In J. Gillette & M.

McCollom (Eds.), *Groups in context: A new perspective on group dynamics* (pp. 34-48). New York: University Press of America, Inc.

McRae, M., & Short, E. L. (2010). *Racial and cultural dynamics in group and organizational life: Crossing boundaries*. Los Angeles: Sage.

Menzies, I. E. P. (1975). A case study in the functioning of social systems as a defense against anxiety. In A. D. Colman & M. H. Geller (Eds.), *Group relations reader 2* (pp. 281-312). Jupiter, FL: The A.K. Rice Institute.

Menzies Lyth, I. (1997). *Containing anxiety in institutions: Selected essays (Vol. 1)*. Great Britain: Free Association Books, LTD.

Miller, E. J. (1989). *The Leicester Conference*. London: Tavistock Institute of Human Relations.

Miller, E. J., & Rice, A. K. (1975). Selections from: Systems of organization. In A. D. Colman & W. H. Bexton (Eds.), *Group relations reader I* (pp. 43-68). Jupiter, FL: The A.K. Rice Institute.

Obholzer, A., & Zagier Roberts, V. (1994a). Authority, power, and leadership. In A. Obholzer & V. Zagier Roberts (Eds.), *The unconscious at work: Individual and organizational stress in the human services* (pp. 39-47). New York: Routledge.

Obholzer, A., & Zagier Roberts, V. (Eds.). (1994b). *The unconscious at work: Individual and organizational stress in the human services*. London: Routledge.

Ogden, T. H. (1982). *Projective identification and psychotherapeutic technique*. New York: Jason Aronson.

Reed, G. M., & Noumair, D. A. (2000). The tiller of authority in a sea of diversity: Empowerment, disempowerment and the politics of identity. In E. B. Klein, F. Gabelnick & P. Herr (Eds.), *Dynamic consultation in a changing workplace* (pp. 51-80). Madison, CT: Psychosocial Press.

Rioch, M. (1975). The work of Wilfred Bion on Groups. In A. D. Colman & W. H. Bexton (Eds.), *Group relations reader I* (pp. 43-68). Jupiter, FL: The A.K. Rice Institute.

Skolnick, M., & Green, Z. (2006). The denigrated other: Diversity in group relations. In S. Cytrynbaum & D. Noumair (Eds.), *Group Dynamics, Organizational Irrationality, and Social Complexity: Group Relations Reader 3.* Jupiter, FL: The A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems.

Turquet, P. M. (1985). Leadership: The individual and the group. In A. D. Colman & M. H. Geller (Eds.), *Group relations reader 2* (pp. 71-87). Jupiter FL: The A.K. Rice Institute.

Wallach, T. (2004). Transforming conflict: A group relations perspective. *Peace and Conflict Studies, 11(1)*, 76-95.

Wallach, T. (2006). Conflict transformation: A group relations perspective. In M. Fitzduff & C. E. Stout (Eds.), *The psychology of resolving global conflicts: From war to peace* (Vol. 1, pp. 285-306). U.K.: Praeger Security International.

Wallach, T. (2008). *Leading Organizational Change from the Inside Out: A Pilot Study to Evaluate Conference Learning*. Lesley University.

Wallach, T. (2009). Pilot Study: Repeating, Reflecting, and Moving On: Germans, Jews, Israelis, Palestinians and Others Today. *Unpublished Qualifying Paper.*

Wallach, T. (2010). *Authority, Leadership and Peacemaking: The Role of the Diasporas: A Pilot Study of a Group Relations Conference. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation*, Lesley University, Cambridge, MA.

Wallach, T. (2012). Authority, leadership, and peacemaking: The intersection of the personal and political in a group relations conference. *Organizational and Social Dynamics, 12(2)*, 171-193.

Zagier Roberts, V. (1994). Conflict and collaboration: Managing intergroup relations. In A. Obholzer & V. Zagier Roberts (Eds.), *The unconscious at work: Individual and organizational stress in the human services* (pp. 187-196). New York: Routledge.