Notes on Consulting to Racism: Linking Individual, Group and Organisational Contexts

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Abstract

This paper frames an ongoing conversation about dealing with race in consultation with organisations. In addition to organisation development, we are utilising a psychodynamic approach that recognises that two levels are at play in every group: the 'group as a whole' and the interplay between individuals' (pair) dynamics. We provide situational narratives to shape a discussion about the topic of racism under five sub-headings:

- Addressing and dealing with the hatred of racial differences.
- The system is more than just race.
- Consulting to the difference between policy and practice when it comes to race.
- Providing incentives for change.
- Using group relations conferences as training for dealing with race.

We provide examples from our own consultation experiences as a way of engaging the reader in a consideration of their own work with racial differences in ongoing organisational interventions. Using these experiences we suggest consulting stances for future work and theoretical horizons that integrate organisation development and psychodynamic consulting traditions.

Key words: consulting practice, consulting dilemmas, racial difference, intervention, organisation consulting.

INTRODUCTION

Seven years ago, we presented a version of this paper to the 2003 15th Scientific Meeting of the A. K. Rice Institute, MIT, Cambridge, MA. Our experiences since then – the continuous waves of hatred surfaced by the events of September 11, 2001, the wave of polarisation around the issues of immigration, and the continued use of race by

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politicians and political pundits to manage and manipulate segments of our societies – suggest to us that the topic of race and racial hatred is still a critical topic for examination.

Our intention for this paper is to frame a conversation about intervening in systems where racism and racial hatred emerges as a central theme. In the beginning, we felt the pressure to offer a solution to this problem. However, we realised, after reflecting on what was reasonable and possible to say, that at best we could only present some of our thoughts and experiences, and see what we could learn. While race is our specific focus, hatred of differences comes in many forms. Many of us, who are in touch with a part of our own identity that the culture cannot purge, deny, or accept, are well aware of other forms of difference hatred. We hope this paper encourages the inclusion of other parts of our experience in this conversation – be they religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or indeed aspects of privilege.

We have identified five areas to focus and frame our discussion and examples. These are:

- The consultant must be ready to observe and deal with hatred about racial difference.
- There is always more to a system than racial differences.
- Whether to emphasise or focus on policy vs practices is a dilemma that emerges during consultation work.
- Creating incentives for change is a way to get group/organisational movement where opposing sides are at odds around racial hatred.
- Group Relations Conferences, in the A. K. Rice Institute tradition, provide an incredibly fruitful training ground for working with the intensity of the race issue.

These areas suggest that any relationship across a racial boundary must continually account for this difference (in race). And, further, at the heart of what we call racism in America is an underlying hatred of difference. The article is organised in several sections – a theoretical framework, context constants, data collection, narratives, and analysis and new horizons.

THEORETICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

In terms of group and organisational life our theoretical and application perspectives have been influenced first by organisation development (Schein, 1969, 1988) and the Tavistock group-as-a-whole perspective (Miller and Rice, 1967; Rice, 1963). Both serve as strong

roots of group dynamics and approaches to consulting to groups. Lately we have found ourselves working through a psychodynamic lens which reveals that there are two 'groups' or dynamics that interplay in every group: the work group and the basic assumption group. Thus, our lens helps us 'see' the group as a whole perspective (Wells, 1980) that encompasses dynamic threats to the leaders' identity (Turquet, 1975, 1985); and the usefulness of thinking of the leader both as one of the interacting members of the group as well as an active participant in the force field of group life (Eisold, 1997).

While theory is important, nothing takes the place of the direct experiential learning and the undeniable energy of application. Here, group relations conferences sponsored by the Tavistock and A. K. Rice Institutes and other independent organisations have been invaluable experiential learning formats (Hayden and Molenkamp, 2003). Thus, this psychodynamic perspective provides a theoretical frame to shape what we see, interpret what we experience, and, from which, to organise a consulting strategy and stance.

For us, the key to this perspective is that the individual functional unit is not the only dynamic in play. Once the individual enters group life a more individual psycho-dynamic becomes obvious and available for the consultant to use and shape consultations. That is, the group does not only make use of the sophisticated skills of its members but also utilises the emotional valence of each of its members to take up roles that are useful to the emotional dynamics of the group in the 'here and now' or present time. This means that an individual member of a group while taking up an overt functional role, for example, problem-solver, will simultaneously take up a covert role, for example, care-taker.

CONTEXT CONSTANTS

We experience the consultant role as multi-ordinal and three-dimensional. It is often similar to or feels like playing three-dimensional chess with the individual, group, and organisation each acting on their levels and impacting the consultant, as the container, all at the same time. In this section, we attempt to develop this three-dimensional dynamic that remained 'constant' through each scenario's context. That is, we share who we are and what is our lens, what was the clients' presenting problem, and how racism emerged during the course of our consultation. We pose and reflect on: did the presenting problem remain the 'bottom line' issue or did racism become the bottom line focus? And, what were the organisational dynamics that emerged and at play throughout the consultation process?

Who we are and our lens

We are two men, one white and one black, both in our seventies. During our life-time, major societal and cultural events emerged that shaped who we are and, thus, our lens. The span of seven decades beginning in 1940 and into 2010, included, to identify a few; the last public lynching (of Emmett Till), the women's liberation movement, the anti-war movement (Viet Nam), and the black power movement. Our work and lens also includes personal organisational involvement in community mental health, corporations, higher education, and public schools and districts – multi-ethnic organisations with a high racial profile. We also share national and international group-relations work.

This element of the 'context constants' is dynamic (vs static). This means that there is a dynamic interplay between who we are individually, as a pair, and our lens. The 'who we are' is similar to a container with all the values and archetypes of ancestors, the copied behaviours of our mentors, and the unconscious automatically driven behavioural strategies that provide our distinct personalities and competencies. Our lens is an instrument that gets focused on something by the container. At one point it is focused on something specific and at another moment it is roaming around the environment flitting back and forth – at one point widescreen while at other moments its focus is narrow and intense. It is always data gathering, pushing and pulling us in and out of our role, to act, to interpret, and to 'see'.

Presenting problem or emerging problem

So as we are engaged in the entry process and/or interviews, the central players emerge. We notice our process and ask ourselves what it is going to be like to appear in front of their group? Will they be sceptical, resentful, or have magical expectations. We notice the authority issues, the roles, the tasks, and various boundaries that are presented (Green and Molenkamp, 2005). These main things seem to be the stage where the other conscious and unconscious issues will play out.

During this actual engagement of the client we notice that often one of us, as we cross the boundary into the client organisation, will 'carry' and experience race as an emerging issue. What we carry as we cross the boundary and enter the client's system may range and vary from race, gender, sexual orientation, and age issues. We attempt to be as open as we can, letting the projective, transference,

counter-transference dynamics impact us, washing over us, and igniting our own sense of ourselves and the client organisation (Stein, 1994).

In each scenario we describe the client, the contract focus, or presenting problem and interpret what we were contracted to do. The inter-twining questions are and were: Was racism the client's actual need? Or, was racism something that emerged as we consulted to the presenting problem or issue? In each of our scenarios we attempt to make a distinction between, or contrast, the presenting problem we were contracted to consult to, the emergence of racism, and their interplay with one another. In general, this relates to the lens problem since a multi-ethnic organisation is bound to struggle with race since it is, as we all are, part of the larger culture. Our experiences suggest that unless the group, thus the organisation, does some specific work integrating differences, the integration defaults to what is common in the general culture combined with individual inclinations – stereotyping, anger, chaos, or denial. In these cases, our lens is dominant for us based on what we have seen in our work and life experiences.

Bottom line issue

In the cases we use, racism is consistently addressed. However, it is not always the key or presenting problem. There were times it was an integral part of the presenting problem yet not the primary problem. In these moments, we felt it needed to be addressed before or as a step integral to addressing the presenting problem. The potentially polarising issues such as race, gender, sexual orientation, etc., seem to us similar to the spices in a good stew or gumbo. They are an integral factor in every presenting problem; sometimes one is more salient, or spicier, then another. Yet, their expression is often salient or bottom line enough that the presenting problem cannot be directly addressed without also addressing the subterranean issue, that is, race, gender, or sexual orientation. Clearly, the contract is the primary expression and identification of the presenting problem. While entering into and working within the client's organisational environment these matters begin to present themselves as integral components of the problem. Sometimes to the extent they become the actual or real presenting problem.

Organisational dynamics

Even in this context was racism the only thing we saw? Even though racism is the primary focus of this article, it was not the only

emerging variable or factor that emerged in these various organisational contexts. What we are presenting is difficult to parse. For our different reasons, race is a part of human diversity and is primary to our lens as people and consultants. When we walk into a racially mixed group, whatever the presenting issue, we look through our lens and ask ourselves questions like: how are they dealing with gender, age, and race? What form does it present itself in – pairs, fight–flight, dependency? We then quickly assess how each area is reflected in the group dynamic and, in the examples we described, race was where we felt there was a way to see their current organisational struggle. Other situations have been different in our experience. Authority boundaries have become crucial when they have been violated or gender rises to the surface in resolving some conflicts. So we guess the best answer is our partnership takes race on directly, as in one case, even though we also got to age and gender, we used race to open the conversation and establish the interaction/conversation we thought would be most helpful at that moment.

It has been useful for us to view the contract to consult to a client organisation as similar to an invitation. Sometimes the invite is directly connected to the presenting problem while in other cases it is an illusion – vibrant, artsy, and confusing. No matter, it is important to note that this, the organisational context, is where all things are in play – the client's goals and objectives; strategic plans and actions; roles, tasks, organisational structure, authority, and boundaries; politics; market niche; levels – individual, groups/teams/units, system; and the conscious and unconscious. Here, the concept of 'mirroring' has been useful. That is, the overt and covert dynamics of the client's entire organisational field is reflected within its various sectors or units (Cooper, 1976).

Working as a pair is also dynamic. There is a sense of magic and rhythm where one of us leads with questions or consulting. Yet, something emerges and the other of us takes it up from a similar or a new sense of direction. We experience this as a disciplined treasure hunt, mind-emotion encumbered, and protracted inquiry.

DATA COLLECTION

As consultants we do daily journal entries as a way of shaping our debriefing sessions and recording key experiences during the consulting process. Thus, we had a series of recorded notes over several years to draw upon. In addition, there were numerous e-mails, letters, and voice messages from members of various client groups. These were often unsolicited yet provoked by the work we were

doing at the time. These experiences served as the catalyst to integrate our efforts with an action research strategy (Lewin, 1946; Seymour-Rolls and Hughes, 2000). Clearly, a key problem is related to taking up multiple roles – as consultants, researchers, participant-observers, and the protagonist for consulting interventions. We found Williamson's (2004) 'protagonist action research' as a clear denomination of a new approach for this circumstance. Of course, ultimately we took into account that for this paper the chief witnesses were our own internal selves.

NARATIVES

In a review of our collective journal entries we identified all of the entries that had a specific focus on racism or an expression of racial hatred. After a systematic review (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) we found that our results could be grouped into five thematic groups or intervention dilemmas: 1. Readiness to deal with racial hatred; 2. Realising there is more to a system then racism; 3. Focusing on policy vs practice; 4. Getting movement through incentives; 5. Group relations conferences as a training vehicle – seemed to be highlighted though out our respective journals. Each of these presents a fundamental dilemma that comes with the consultation territory. First, there is always the presenting problem and its issues that the consultant is hired to address and deal with. However, as noted here, the dilemma is the context in which the consultant must also keep connected with the depth of race, with hatred as the entangled emotion, and at the same time embrace and consult to the presenting problem and its issues.

1. Readiness to deal with racial hatred

This scenario is drawn from the opportunities we have had to consult to senior and middle management teams. Here the presenting problems ranged from team building in response to conflicts, role transitions, and integration of professional learning. For us, racism is about hatred – hatred that the issue is present, hatred that the experience of difference is so raw, hatred of hatred itself, and hatred about having to communicate about it. This has always felt like the heart of the challenge. That is, being ready for the power of race and racial hatred is the clearest and simplest way to be prepared for dealing with the issue.

It is worth clarifying that we are referring to the intolerance of a relationship breach that cannot be bridged. Race is not necessarily

like a conflict which can be resolved – as with a loved one – so that the threat of loss can be transformed to work on healing. In the conflict, maybe the difference cannot be patched up, but some amount of compromise or talking through softens the experience of the difference. Even in relationships across a racial boundary that has lasted many years, we have to be willing to face the reality that there are differences in perspective and personality that will continue. And, we do not like it one bit. However, when race comes into play in a relationship, the difference in experience is clearly unbridgeable. Any inter-racial connection has to be based on some continuous mutual accounting of this difference – and that is the hatred we are referring to. If we are going to relate to 'the other' we have to attend to his/her different experience. Of course, one might argue, and we believe correctly, that the presence of the other has to be taken into account in any relationship. True enough. What stirs us up, however, is that with race there is never a moment of genuine plausible deniability.

Deniability is possible, no doubt, since we, and others we know, do it. But it feels unreliable, unstable, and totally conditional. It seems to us that at the heart of racism is the hatred of this ongoing relationship work that must be done. By putting 'the other' group in a disadvantageous position in our psychological and/or social world is to relieve ourselves of having to do the necessary joining work.

There are any number of intellectual protections for the hatred, which we believe can become impenetrable barriers, but it is important to know that they are erected in front of, and surrounding the hatred. Ideas like: 'the issue is competence (or gender, or class, etc.), not race', 'there is no racial issue at all except what you (as consultant) are provoking', 'my (racist) comment was an accident and I really didn't mean it', and the ever popular 'some of my best friends are . . .'. Racial hatred is just not easy to talk about, so we do not at all believe that barriers to the conversation, when they are present, can be beaten down. With an *offensive* attitude, the consultant is more likely to get exhausted and beaten. So, what are we to do?

As consultants we readied ourselves and, in preparation, started with an examination of our own experience with racism in groups; diverse groups. One example is what we call the 'silence' strategy or container. This is the silence that takes place following a Black person's comments in a working group. It goes like this – the Black person is doing work in a group of peers (community members, chairs of task forces or commissions) and she/he voices some problem solving strategy and it is received with silence and looks around the room. Later, during the same time frame, in the same group, a

white colleague will voice the identical or paraphrased observation or problem solving strategy, which is followed by animated conversation among the group members with explicit or implicit compliments to the speaker.

These types of incidents seem so unimportant, so insignificant. Yet, they are filled with an invitation to examine the powerful underlying emotions contained within the incident that make them appear unimportant. Earlier in the incidents' appearance we commented with something like 'He (or she) just said that but it was ignored and it seemed to make him (or her) angry'. In later reoccurrences of similar events we asked more open-ended questions like 'help me understand why his/her comments met with silence and "so-and-so's" comments were met with acceptances and compliments'. For many groups the response is more silence. However, often one or two members will ask what did you mean or, that they saw the same thing but, was that racism? We are certain that experienced consultants are used to taking whatever is presented and working it until the 'real' underlying issues emerge – in this case the racism or racial hatred.

2. More to a system than racism

In these cases the presenting problem was how to follow up on the experience and learning from a group relations conference. By way of example, one of us co-consulted with an African-American woman to a law firm soon after its management team had attended a group relations conference. The prime mover for the consultation was the black woman member of their team, their head litigator, who had become really interested in the learning that resulted from the (group relations) conference consultations. In this case, the agency director was being dragged along behind her. There were many difficulties in this agency. For example, there were no job descriptions, making performance evaluations impossible; tasks were falling between the cracks, and everyone was feeling incredibly overworked. Also, the management team was locked in an intense battle. It seemed that the director had an open door policy, so staff frequently wandered in and complained – most often about the personality and leadership style of the black litigator. So, not only could the director not get her work done but, she was also increasingly angry at the black woman for being so difficult. In other words, she took in the staff complaints 'lock, stock, and barrel'. The fact that this woman was the only black professional in the firm had never been part of their conversation. It did not take long

to figure out why – the director wanted nothing to do with this topic and instead wanted to concern herself with the management and personality deficiencies of this African-American woman.

As consultants, we worked with them on the structural problems making some headway on those issues: job descriptions, for instance, were organised. For periods of time, the director closed her office door and got her work done. However, the race dynamic was too powerful to be stopped. The director kept getting reports she felt she could not ignore about her top lawyer not having proper manners, being too rough with her support staff, too rigid, and so on. The director would go to her top attorney, complain, get angry and corrective, and there would be a big blow-up. As the consultation developed, and as we tried to move the supposed personality clash into the realm of a staff and organisational group dynamic, the director got more and more agitated, began to push for her teammate to resign. Eventually this is what happened. As consultants, we had to both hold the structural issues that had to be dealt with and the intractable, hateful racial scapegoating that could not be brought into the conversation.

It seems important to underline that as consultants we had to embrace the direct issues we were hired to deal with, even though the elephant in the room was race. We worked it in every way we could – within the management team, within the director-attorney pair, and with the director and attorney alone. In all of these settings we worked as a consultant pair and as individual consultants. The more we stuck with this issue the more frustrated and angry we as consultants became and it was clear that whether we kept the anger or returned it to them (the staff), they wanted nothing to do with such hatefulness. It was fascinating that even in follow-up meetings, when we talked with them about what we had and had not accomplished, there had been no new thinking about race as an organisational issue, and in fact, when this black woman left, she was replaced by a white woman attorney promoted from within who we both felt had been a major agitator against this black woman. It was a further fire-wall against the issue. On the other hand, the structural/management changes we helped introduce had continued to be useful.

In another case, we were consulting to a group of superintendents who were a part of a national forum of public school superintendents. Their task was to examine the issues of race and class. Yet, when they were presented with the opportunities to do this examination, the female superintendents took up the role of 'servant' and 'care-takers' of the group – getting cookies, bringing in the sodas,

making comforting statements (when the situation did not call for them). Further, their voices were silenced. When speaking of their experiences in the CEO role and interacting with their peers there were tears, anguish, and pain.

The experience of these women presented an equally powerful dynamic to examine and, at the same time, served to veer the attention away from the underlying emotion of racial hatred or racism. During these dynamics the white male consultant was filled with anger and rage as he consulted to the group regarding the men's behaviour in their efforts to ignore the matter of racism, the experience of the women being silenced, and the role the 'good old boys' group was playing in the discussion.

It seems that there is often some other container of emotions that needs to be unravelled before the issue of racial hatred or racism can be examined. In this case, the experience and use of the women in this group needed to be addressed or worked through as a gateway to consciously examining race or racial hatred. For this group examining gender issues was a safer place to begin an examination of race and class.

3. Focusing on policy vs practice

In this case, the presenting problem was about policy issues that seem to affect staff diversity. The policy vs practices dilemma goes something like this. On the one side, it is clear, from the literature and from being in an organisation, that institutional racism is constructed so that no individual or group of individuals can be found responsible for policies that in fact put a racial group at a disadvantage in the institution. And, in fact, it is probably true in modern organisations that policies *are* more race-neutral than ever. On the other hand, the racism is encoded in the procedures of the organisation and gets played out behaviourally.

To unravel biased procedures cloaked in reasonable policies requires collaborative willingness to join with consultants in the exploration and search. This work exists in the feelings of participants and the policy structures do not reveal these feelings.

So when entering a school whose mission was teaching English as a second language to immigrants from many countries and cultures, and *all the staff but one* were white Americans, we were on the alert. Clearly, there were hiring policies no individual would take responsibility for that led directly to racial exclusionary practices. On the policy side of the dilemma, with some kind of appeal to fairness, affirmative action, and social justice, we have focused successfully in

such organisations to suggest useful changes. This took place even if no one would buy the belief that it would enrich their primary goal with the students. We felt these interventions had some success and it ended up a win–win situation. Thus working at the policy level, it is a matter of ferreting out the *institutional* elements and making changes that do not challenge individuals about their own feelings.

On the procedural side, it is predictable that there is trouble when there is a racial incident because nobody wants to touch it or the hatred that is folded into it. This is not about policies, at least, not very much. Taking the above school, as an example, the invitation to consult was offered when the one non-Caucasian teacher was repeatedly the object of racial slurs and could not get anyone to listen to her distress and anger. That is, until she threatened a lawsuit. Then the administration woke up.

In meeting with the staff, they were divided into two groups of twelve for a few months. In these small groups, the administration provided the staff an opportunity to talk about policy change and exposed them to an open conversation about the critical incident. The most liberal group members agreed that the racial comments were slurs that could and should be avoided. These same staff were present when the comments were made! What about that? Well, '. . . we didn't say anything because it would have caused a social ruckus and left bad blood'. So a few of them went to the target of the comments, after the incident had occurred, and reassured her privately that they were on her side. These were the more liberal and socially conscious of the staff.

Most of the others thought the Asian woman who had been the target was hypersensitive, that is, the perpetrator really did not mean it, and all should be forgiven even though it took weeks and weeks for any apology to be forthcoming. There was no way this group would deal with its behaviour or the underlying feelings. We were not helping our popularity by continually returning to the racism even though the consultation was requested in order to assist them in talking about the incident. Focusing on this level of the work, we had to be satisfied with several members of the staff agreeing to meet after the end of the consulting contract to continue to explore issues of cultural differences.

Clearly, we had to be satisfied with a sharpening of policy and hiring procedures, on one level, and heighten whatever awareness could be reached among the minority of individuals who were open to the social/feeling issues hoping that they might continue to have conversations that would modify opinions and behaviours. Certain deeper feelings held by the staff and, thus, the organisation, were

best left out of view. It never ceases to humble us the degree to which policies are impersonal and the personal is dissociated.

We have had contracts terminated because of this dilemma. We often contract with a client to work an issue with much of the successful work in the area of policy. Yet, the client reaches a point were the underlying feelings within the organisation are about to explode and the senior group in the organisation is not prepared for and is unwilling to diffuse these deeply held individual and collective feelings.

4. Getting movement through incentives

Here the matter of race was contained in the presenting problem. Our primary question was – how is it possible to construct an incentive for groups that hate each other to do something different with their mutual hatred? We find this at least imaginable on a small scale – not settling the middle-east cataclysm. For us the issue is, as it often is, how to capture the group dilemma and shape an intervention. It often happens that consultants are invited into an organisation where there is an intense stand-off with someone outside the immediate group who has an investment in change. This represents our optimism, because we shudder to recall the many times we have been invited to consult where the agenda was to confirm that no change was possible, or a certain theory of blame was accurate, or because there was some illusion about our powers to do the impossible. We have found ourselves in trouble if and when we do not anticipate darker motivations. But sometimes as the outsider we see a group in trouble and want to help. Further, we are also positioned in the organisation's hierarchy and are able to present the group with consultation.

A state university department of English was in a terrible fix because of alleged immoral behaviour of the department chair with a black woman student. The issue had escaped the departmental boundary and upper administration wanted the issue handled properly within the department or else the department would be defunded. The dean called for outside consultation. We entered into the contract, after meeting with the individual faculty members, with a team of three consultants. The number of contacts was very limited – eight group meetings – and while we had the sense that meeting in a large group of about twenty-five to thirty faculty and staff was risky, with the three of us attending to and working with particular sectors in the large group setting, we might have a chance of promoting a good and deep conversation.

The individual meetings with faculty revealed that the moral crisis had gone on long enough; that race, as well as several other interpersonal issues, had become folded into the mix. And, senior faculty members – several of whom were African-American and Native-American – had withdrawn psychologically. Support staff, almost all young African-American women, were outraged and were ready to talk about morality and about being used behind closed doors to answer questions from students about the scandal. Race and class became the topic, and the incentive behind the conversation – about which we reminded them frequently – was the defunding of the department. While there was no support for the sexual misconduct, it was as if the heat was too much to contain in the conversation. By very actively structuring the conversation, we were able to get various sectors to speak up. Senior people were actively recruited to come to the meetings and put in their wit and wisdom as well as their alliance with proper behaviour. White faculty were brought to face their opinions – if not their feelings – about professional behaviour with students and release themselves temporarily from their teaching and tenure concerns. The perpetrator, who felt immune because he was 'so liberated' and so 'active' in promoting the scholarship in the department, realised just how angry everyone was at him. Little by little hatreds and rage transformed into more decent working arrangements with the support staff, and the importance of attending to their group interactions became more apparent. In the end, there was more resolve to better monitor *themselves* and the department.

The outside administrator who had promoted the consultation never appeared in person and was not terribly interested in the consultation. He was pleased with the result. As consultants, we were also pleased with the outcome and the threat of defunding turned out to be a useful tool.

5. *Using group relations conferences as training vehicles*

Group Relations Conferences have been an incredible training ground for us – as individuals and as a working pair – for working with the intensity of the race issue. For one thing, both of us have experienced an exposure to strong emotions of many different kinds – not only the neediness, frustration, and rage that has been directed toward us, but also, our own desires for approval and influence, our frustrations at not being able to change a particular dynamic, and our own hatred when we find ourselves overly focused on a member or a cohort with whom we have over-identified.

The dilemma of speaking out is very clear. To speak out has felt scary and still does. Almost without fail speaking out ignites an angry counter-response to uncovering that which we have been covertly invited to join in suppressing or being selectively inattentive to. On the other side, however, we have felt just how palpably silence is a joining and support for letting the issue slip away unnoticed. To not speak is to just let it happen. There has been no better place then group relations conferences for us to experience this dilemma.

The staff's openness to working from a feeling place has provided a unique opportunity for engagement and conversation on race and hatred in a way that has kept us interested and involved for over thirty years. From a selfish point of view, while we have had a sense of where there has been value added to others from the many exchanges about such concerns, we have grown immensely from them. Along the way, we have forged a relationship with each other and others that have been deep and long-lasting.

Another big piece of group relations conference learning for us was a big dose of just how often people's theories of themselves – a 'theory of mind' (Baron-Cohen, 1991) – puts emotions in the background. It seems we are so focused in our culture on instrumental, practical behaviour and outcomes that the prevailing theory of mind is one of organising plans and functional outcomes. Group relations conferences make it utterly compelling not only that the furnace of passions burns pretty hot in our social world but also, having a protected experience like a conference, lets us know more about these fires in ourselves as well as in others. We cannot say this is a lesson we like, but we have found it worth staying in for the course and we think we are better for it.

Yes, thank goodness for conferences – one place we can and must consistently examine our own work and working hypotheses and assumptions around race and racial hatred.

ANALYSIS AND SOME THOUGHTS FOR THE FUTURE

In this section we would like to make the connection of the narratives to one of our theoretical lens – the psychodynamic lens. One thing these narratives shared or had in common was 'pairs' or the pairing phenomena. That is, pairs dominated many of the clients' group dynamics. In the psychodynamic perspective the appearance of a pair has meaning for the group.

The emotions at the collective unconscious level were so powerful that two members of the group were used, or needed, to contain

their intensity at the conscious level. While the emotions of the individual members of the group were and are important, for a deeper consulting stance, we were looking for how these collective emotions revealed themselves at a 'group as a whole' level (Wells, 1980). Theoretically, these pairs are representative of tacit assumptions prevalent in the group, they are deductible from the emotional state of the group, and they elucidate the behaviour of the group to the extent it is not focusing on its primary task (Rioch, 1970).

The pairing dynamic consisted of a pair or several pairs of group members independent of gender. The emotional strategies of bonding, expressions of warmth and affection, intellectual support, anger, and argumentative posturing were expressions of the pairing phenomenon. In addition to the two members actively involved, the other group members became inactive and were 'seduced' away from working on its primary task. This was a signal for a closer examination of the appearance of racial hatred. Instead of a focus on the primary work task there was a sense of operating in a survival mode based on the collective projections into the two group members making up the pair.

The pairs emerged in several patterns. In one pattern a pair emerged one at a time; sometimes with the same individuals. In another, the pairs emerged one after another; each pair with different individuals. A third pattern consisted of pairs emerging 'on top of each other' – a cacophony of pairs – noisy and intense. The emotional content seemed to be testing the structure, process, and safety of our consultations. Can you control and manage this situation? You raised the issue now let's see if you can deal with it! Do you really want us to tell and show you what we are feeling and thinking?

Clearly, this is a vastly different stance for consultation. The pull is to address the needs of the two members involved in the pair as opposed to a struggle with the meaning of why the pair or pairs were emerging in the first place. From this point of view the emotion 'racial hatred' was so strong that these groups were concerned about the survival of its members and the organisation. This spontaneous emergence of such an intense emotion had destructive potential. This is what organisations complain about in their efforts to address cultural diversity – the emergence of the proverbial 'Pandora's box'. These organisational leaders use the metaphor to reflect that the issues arising from diversity training may be unforeseen, unpredictable, and unmanageable (Shapiro and Carr, 1991). What we report is that these collective unconscious emotional states are an integral part of any transformative process in groups and organisations. Further, we suggest that these phenomena can be

understood in theory and practice. We recognise that its emergence is linked to other issues in the organisational system and the policy vs practice dilemma is one catalyst for its emergence.

We have presented five areas to focus and frame a discussion about consulting to race and racial hatred. These areas – being ready to deal with race and racial hatred, a system being more then racial differences, the dilemmas policy vs practices and incentives for opposing sides, and group relations conferences – suggest that any relationship across a racial boundary must continually account for this difference. We hope the sharing of our experiences has served as a catalyst to your own thinking about this matter.

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