Collective Guilt as a Force for Change: A Concept Paper

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Systems psychodynamics scholars and practitioners believe that when people assemble for a task, two forms of mental activity occur simultaneously: The task-oriented work group and the anxiety-fueled basic assumption group. Much has been written about the dynamics of basic assumption groups yet relatively little research has examined the work group or the space between configurations, what Winnicott might have called the 'potential space' between one identifiable group position and another. The following paper addresses this gap by hypothesizing that under the right conditions an instinctive, developmental push— an unconscious sense of guilt—may propel some basic assumption groups' swing back to work mode. Areas warranting further research will also be identified.[i]

KEYWORDS: Collective Guilt, Group Violence, Systems Psychodynamics, Wilfred Bion, Basic Assumptions

Introduction

Hundreds of thousands of lives have been lost in identity related group conflicts over the past decade in places such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Congo, Croatia, Guatemala, Iran, Iraq, Myanmar, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, the US and UK, to name just a few. Although alarming, what remains a surprising historical anomaly about this global genocide is that these disputes are not between warring nations but conflicts inspired by ethnic, religious and culturally based feuds within the boundaries of a single country (Volkan 1997, p. 16). Given the pervasiveness of these conflicts, there is an urgent need to understand better the forces influencing group violence and develop strategies to improve inter-group relations and provide opportunities for reparation. To accomplish this analysis of group behavior we can turn to the field of *systems psychodynamics* for guidance.

Systems psychodynamics is an 'interdisciplinary field amalgamating a triad of influences—the practice of psychoanalysis, the theories and methods of the field of group relations, and the task and boundary awareness of open systems perspectives' (Fraher 2004b, p. 65). *Systems psychodynamics* scholars and practitioners posit that when people assemble for a task, there are actually two major configurations of mental activity present

simultaneously: one set is found in the task-oriented *work group* and the other in the anxiety-fueled *basic assumption group*. As a result, the group oscillates between a state of sophisticated work and a number of possible defensive modes in response to the tensions and anxieties of group, organizational and work life. But what accounts for this pendulous group activity? In other words, what causes groups to abandon task in favor of a defensive state—what Bion (1961) called *basic assumption* mode—and, conversely, what causes the group to move back toward work mode. How might knowing this force exists have an impact on the ways in which we work with groups?

Although much has been written about Bion, his foundational theories and experiential methods of working with groups, few authors have attempted to explain the '*space between*' (Sorenson 2005), or what Winnicott (1971) might have called the 'potential space' between one identifiable group position and another. In the following essay I explore this space between and hypothesize that an 'instinctive' (Miller 1998, p. 40) 'developmental push' (Armstrong 2005, p. 145) or what I call an *unconscious sense of guilt*, may be the force that propels some basic assumption groups' swing back to work mode.

In this concept paper, I provide a theoretical overview of a hypothesis for study in actual groups. My intention is not simply to map existing research about individual guilt onto groups or Bion's *bas*, but rather to evaluate group dynamics for new patterns of collective behavior. In order to accomplish this goal, I will review contributions from psychology, sociology, philosophy, and political science as well as the group relations field. The novelty of this paper lies not in its contribution to empirical research as much as in its identification of gaps in previous theories in order to point one possible way forward to deepen analysis of group behavior, focusing specifically on how groups get back to work mode.

Although Bion's contributions remain a popular topic of discussion among group relations' theorists, some scholars have questioned what seems to be a widespread fixation on analysis of basic assumption group behavior to the exclusion of other forces at play within the group. For example, Armstrong (2005) noted with concern that 'the concept of the basic assumptions has been a continuing focus of attention, curiosity and puzzlement, both in literature and in practice of Group Relations' (p. 140). Similarly, Gold (2006) cautioned 'Bion's description of Basic Assumption groups' may be 'in danger of becoming institutionalized themselves, the equivalent of geometric optics' (p. 89). As a result, Armstrong (2005) observes, the dynamics of the work group, to which I would also add the *space between* group modes, have been:

taken for granted, as if it were quite evident and unproblematic. Or as if its role were simply to get the much more intriguing theme of basic assumption functioning off the ground. I believe this neglect to be a mistake, which limits and may sometimes distort both our understanding and practice (p. 140).

Others agree that the field of group relations' preoccupation with Bion's basic assumptions has left little space for other theories to come forward, and what 'new thinking' emerged 'is consciously linked' to the development of more basic assumptions (Fraher 2004, p. 41).

As evidenced by the following, Bion (1978) had a sense that this fixation might occur:

> We learn these theories—Freud's, Jung's, Klein's—and try to get them absolutely rigid so as to avoid having to do any more thinking. But we cannot make a conscious and deliberate attempt to help the process of development if we start by being mentally fossilized. (p. 6)

Eisold (2005) agrees, observing Bion 'feared what has come to pass', which is 'a tendency to venerate his "discoveries" as immutable truths and, thus, undermine them as serious efforts at thinking. As venerated concepts, his ideas restrict our capacity to expand our own "thinking"' (p. 9) and thereby evolve the field of group study.

In fact, Bion looked for theory in the everyday, calling his basic assumptions 'crude constructions, generalizations' (Bion 1978, p. 44) not elegant constructs, and invited further developments, noting in an interview shortly before his death, 'the notion of "basic assumption" needs tremendous investigation' (Banet 1976, p. 274). Yet, he is also quick to point out that 'general theory may be good enough for wide application, but in practice, in the world of reality, we are always up against the precise and particular instance, not the general'. If theories 'don't remind me of real life they are no use to me'. They must correlate to 'something which I can see at any time in the world in which I live' (Bion 1978, p. 44).

Eisold (2005) wondered if there was not a better way to use Bion, challenging 'the authority vested in his ideas by others' and his 'larger than life' persona by restoring 'him to us as a fallible thinker, as an interesting and useful seeker after truth' (p. 2). I agree and accept Bion's invitation to join him in 'the exercise of disciplined curiosity' (Bion 1978, p. 23) about group behavior, the development of group theories and their application to the world in which we live.

Bion's Contributions

As a psychoanalyst, Bion was of course influenced by the foundational work of Sigmund Freud. Yet more important to the development of his group theories than Freud's intra-psychic model was the work of his analyst Melanie Klein. Klein's theories provided the conceptual bridge with which others like Bion could link the *individual's* unconscious experience with theories about *group* behavior. Klein (1985) had hypothesized that guilt and a desire for reparation was a 'part of normal development' (p. 12). She observed that 'the irrevocable fact that none of us is ever entirely free from guilt has very valuable aspects because it implies the never fully exhausted wish to make reparation and to create in whatever way we can' (p. 15), supporting guilt as an 'instinctive' emotion (Miller 1989, p. 40).

Two Configurations of Mental Activity

Bion hypothesized that people's membership in groups often evoked some of the same contradictory feelings Klein observed in infants, triggering 'primitive phantasies whose origins lie in the earliest years of life' (Gabriel 1999, p. 118) driving group behaviors in both subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

> The more disturbed the group, the more easily discernable are these primitive phantasies and mechanisms; the more stable the group, the more it corresponds with Freud's description of the group as a repetition of family group patterns and neurotic mechanisms. (Bion 1961, p. 165)

One of Bion's major contributions was to hypothesize that when a group of people assembles for a task, there are actually two groups; *two configurations of mental activity,* present simultaneously: the sophisticated, task-oriented work group *(W-group)* and the anxiety-fueled basic assumption group (ba). The two modes co-exist within the tapestry of group life, sometimes supporting and sometimes subverting the task of the group.

Lawrence, Bain and Gould (1996) note 'the genius of Bion was to recognize that people in groups behave at times collectively in a psychotic fashion or, rather, the group mentality drives the process in a manner akin to temporary psychosis' (p. 3). Although Bion did not discover these concepts, per se, developing the basic assumption construct was 'immensely useful in calling attention to the fact that there are covert purposes to group behaviour when the *group as a whole* is considered (Eisold 2005 p. 3). In other words, rather than presume each individual in a group is operating independently under their own free will, Bion (1961) hypothesized that there are 'occasions when the group attitude is utterly unmistakable'

(p. 45) creating a group culture that may not be rational. In this instance, the *ba* group will act as if certain things are true regardless of whether this assumption is supported by facts. 'The more a group manages to maintain a sophisticated level of behaviour, the more it uses the emotions associated with one basic assumption to suppress and control the emotions associated with the other two' (Rice 1965, p. 13).

Group-As-A-Whole

Other theorists have attempted to define basic group theory by developing new *ba's* such as Turquet's (1974) 'oneness', Gustafson's 'pseudo-mutuality' (cited in Gosling 1994), Lawrence et al.'s (1996) 'me-ness,' Hopper's (1996) 'incohesion: massification/ aggregation', and Cano's (1998) 'grouping'. Yet Miller (1998) contends, rather than detecting basic *group* theory, 'most attempts to identify additional basic assumptions - with the exception of Turquet's (1974) 'oneness'…refer to the relatedness of the individual to the group rather than to the *basic dynamic of the group itself as a group*' (italics added, p. 44). Eisold (2005) agrees, observing that although the new bas 'are all thoughtful and useful ways of characterizing group behavior', proposing them as basic assumptions perpetuates 'the idea that group behavior can be conceptualized along the lines of certain essential, repetitive patterns' of individual behavior (p. 3) rather than basic, instinctive dynamics of the *group-as-a-whole.*

Considering the *group-as-a-whole* requires a perceptual shift away from viewing people only as distinct individuals in control of their destiny and individual goals, to viewing them also as interrelated group members, whose collective interactions tell us something more about the group as a system. 'Of course, at one level, it is nonsensical to talk about a group feeling something, for the feelings reside in and are actually felt by the members of the group' (Smith and Berg 1987, p. 63). Yet, through this lens, we can see the group as a powerful force, developing a virtual life of its own as a consequence of the ideas and beliefs its members bring to it. In other words, whatever behavior occurs within the group, whatever members speak about in the group, is also a reflection of the group, and not only of the individuals who are acting or speaking (Fraher 2005; Rice 1965).

Bion (1961) pondered 'what could precipitate the change from one basic assumption to another' (p. 163). In response, he offered:

> No matter what basic assumption is active, investigation discloses that the elements in the emotional situation are so closely allied to phantasies of the earlier anxieties that the group is compelled, whenever the pressure of anxiety becomes too great, to take defensive action
> (p. 163).

In other words, the group swings from one *ba* to another when anxiety rooted in early childhood phantasies and mechanisms associated with that *ba* becomes too much for the group to bear.

For instance, the group will tolerate *baP* (pairing) until anxiety associated with memories of the 'primitive primal scene' (Bion 1961, p. 164), such as oedipal conflicts and sexuality, become overwhelming. The group then shifts from *baP* to another mode, perhaps *baF* (fight/flight), in an effort to contain anxiety and offer distraction from activities that are causing too much stress to address consciously. When, in *baF*, if hostility rises to the point that survival of the group is in jeopardy the group may then transition to another mode, perhaps *baD* (dependency), where the group acts as if it has gathered to obtain security from a supernatural leader on whom they powerlessly depend.

Yet, paradoxically, Higgin and Bridger (1965) hypothesize that individual group members are often in different modes of group process, some in *W-mode* and some in *ba*, at any one time:

> In achieving a goal a group not only needs to do work at the conscious sophisticated
> level required to achieve its task; it also needs to do work of an emotional, less conscious
> sophisticated kind, to contain or appropriately direct the basic assumptions arising from the
> anxieties which it will inevitably face. (p. 2)

Isabel Menzies Lyth further expanded this idea, noting bas are always potentially present, interacting with the *W-group*, fueled by anxiety and unconscious phantasies: It is 'never one or the other'. The group looks 'to achievement of task' to keep it oriented to *W*, 'but when anxieties get too high, *bas* surface', and the group may swing away from work mode toward a more defensive, psychotic state (I. Menzies Lyth, personal communication, February 20, 2004). 'There is therefore no Work Group activity totally without signs of the goings-on typical of a Basic Assumption Group, provided one is perspicacious enough to see them' (Gosling 1994, p. 2) and 'always a little *W* available, otherwise consultation wouldn't work' (I. Menzies Lyth, personal communication, February 20, 2004). But how then can groups access this '*potential W*'?

The Dynamics of the Group Itself as a Group

Although the identification of anxieties as the underlying cause of a group's shift between *bas*, and even from *W-mode* to *ba* group, is clear, Bion provides few clues to understand what triggers the ba group to contain its defenses better and shift its mental processing more effectively toward the sophisticated, task focused *W-group* mode. In other words, if anxieties drive the group away from task towards a *ba* mode, what drives the group back towards

work? I hypothesize that, under the right conditions, the shift from *ba* to *W-group* mode may be propelled by an *unconscious sense of guilt* rooted in the group's recognition and acceptance of responsibility for its own aggressive, destructive tendencies.

Bion (1961) observed a main cause of anxiety in groups is that 'the individual is a group animal at war, both with the group and with those aspects of his personality that constitute his 'groupishness'' (p. 168). Yet paradoxically, Armstrong (2005) notes humans are as 'hopelessly committed' to development as they are to more destructive and regressive modes of group behavior. Therefore, groups are as instinctively driven to the *W-group* as to the *ba mode* (p. 144). While the *ba group* can be viewed as a 'regressive pull' that seeks to contain anxiety, evade responsibility and avoid the mental anguish development implies, the *W-group* can be seen as the expression of a 'compulsion to develop' at the group level, a 'developmental push' built in to the human organism (p. 145). As a result, 'the conscious life of the group' is always an expression of 'both push and pull' (Armstrong 2005, p. 146). To understand better what happens in groups the tension and transition between these poles must be explored.

Collective Feelings

In recent years, the concept of a group holding a collective feeling such as *guilt* (Branscombe and Doosje 2004; Halloran 2007), *shame* (Curtler 1986; Fessler 2004) or *responsibility* (Abdel-Nour 2003; Castano and Giner-Sorolla 2006; Celermajer 2007) has emerged as a focus in social science research, often exploring such phenomena as war, genocide, terrorism, corporate fraud, and other forms of group violence.

Volkan, Ast and Greer (2002) note 'Although certain disasters may fall into several categories of shared trauma' it remains useful to differentiate among them 'because it is only the disaster in which an identifiable enemy group has intentionally inflicted pain, suffering, shame, humiliation, and helplessness on its victims that can trigger a particular large group identity process' (p. 10). Even today, our understanding of the effects of this shared experience of group violence continues to be tied to studies of second and third generation Holocaust survivors and others directly traumatized under the Third Reich. Obviously those who fought or were beaten, tortured, raped or displaced from their homes are most directly traumatized. Yet even those members who are not personally affected are still subject to less direct but nevertheless powerful psychological, social, political and economic repercussions. 'As injured self- and internalized object-images pass from generation to generation, the chosen trauma they carry assumes new functions, new tasks' (Volkan et al. 2002, p. 43).

As a result, the historical facts of the event become less important than the sense of being linked together by the symbol of shared trauma which usually becomes highly mythologized. For example, many Jews around the globe define their group identity by direct or indirect reference to the Holocaust; Czech's reference the 1620 Battle of Bil Hora, while Scots keep the 1746 Battle of Colloden alive; and the Dakota American Indians link to the anniversary of Wounded Knee from 1890 all examples of what Volkan et al. (2002) call incidents of 'chosen traumas' (p. 41). Although large groups may have experienced any number of traumas in their history only certain ones remain alive over the years, 'chosen' to be transmitted from generation to generation becoming internalized as 'unconscious fantasies' (p. xiii).

As large group identities evolve over time, the group defines and differentiates itself and a sense of ethnocentrism develops, fostering prejudices as members privilege their own group over others. Like individuals, large groups regress under stress, falling back on primitive ways of behaving and fantasizing, for instance, that the environment is more dangerous than it actually is or that other groups are more hostile and powerful than they really are (Volkan 1997). Volkan (1988) even hypothesizes that it is 'human nature'; a social, psychological and political *human* need to have enemies (p.5). By de-humanizing the enemy, groups attempt to avoid unpleasant emotions such as guilt for the violence they commit.

Castano and Giner-Sorolla (2006) note recent research clearly shows that individuals can experience emotions 'on behalf of their in-group' (p. 804). For example, Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, and Manstead (1998) measured Dutch students' collective guilt about the Dutch colonization of Indonesia; Lyer, Leach and Crosby (2003) studied White Americans' perceptions of collective responsibility for on-going discrimination against African-Americans; and Roccas, Klar and Liviatan (2004) examined Israelis' sense of collective guilt about the Israeli-Palestinian relationship while Halloran (2007) studied Australians' sense of collective guilt and attitudes towards reconciliation with indigenous Aboriginal groups. 'Although there is little doubt that collective guilt sometimes emerges when people are reminded of the misdeeds of their group' extensive evidence supports the view that 'violence toward other human beings goes hand in hand with their dehumanization' (Castano and Giner-Sorolla 2006, p. 805).

Guilt

Thoughts from Psychology

Shortly before his death, Bion (1979) reflected on the concept of 'guilt' calling it 'one of the fundamentals, one of the *basic assumptions*' (italics added, p. 54). It is not within the scope of this paper to debate whether Bion meant by this comment to add 'guilt' to *baP, baF*

and *baD* as another venerable basic assumption. To take up this argument would fall prey to my previously discussed contention that group relations scholars tend to fixate on definitions and interpretations of basic assumptions. Suffice to say that reflected in Bion's comment is a sense that guilt is a fundamental force in group life. But how so?

Freud viewed anxiety and guilt as closely connected, yet concluded 'the term "guilt" is only applicable in regard to manifestations of conscience which are the result of super-ego development' (Klein 1980, p. 33). For instance, in *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud (1929) explored the tension between an individual's instinctual desires and the restrictions civilization places on his or her thinking and actions. One common result of the unresolved tension between self and society, Freud noted, is an '*unconscious sense of guilt*' (p. 86) for primitive thoughts and feelings, that, although not acted upon, still plague the imperfect human. 'Any kind of frustration, any thwarted instinctual satisfaction, results, or may result, in a heightening of the sense of guilt' (p. 85). He further explained: 'a sense of guilt arising from remorse for an evil *deed* must always be conscious, whereas a sense of guilt arising from the perception of an evil *impulse* may remain unconscious' (p. 84).

In this interpretation, Klein (1980) supported Freud's theory. Noting 'guilt is inextricably bound up with anxiety' (p. 38), she hypothesized that the human's first sense of anxiety is the birth process, during which the infant experiences pain and the loss of intra-uterine safety as an attack by hostile forces. In response, the infant develops a sense of 'persecutory anxiety' toward external objects, developing destructive fantasies about biting, devouring and annihilating the bad breast/mother and fantasizing that, in retaliation, the bad breast/mother will attack him or her in the same greedy, aggressive manner. The more aggressive the infant's fantasies, the greater its sense of persecutory anxiety, fear of retaliation and dependence on the good breast/mother for protection (Klein 1952). As the infant matures persecutory anxiety lessens, giving rise to feelings of mourning, guilt and 'depressive anxiety' as both the loved and hated objects are synthesized into one. 'The basis of depressive anxiety', Klein (1980) postulates, is the 'process by which the ego synthesizes destructive impulses and feelings of love', reconciling its aggressive feelings. 'This reparative tendency can, therefore, be considered as a consequence of the sense of guilt', (p. 36) setting the stage for the development of the concept of *collective guilt*.

How do these theories apply to groups? When persecutory anxieties get too high, previously managed *bas* now surface, swinging the group back towards a more defensive state. When persecutory anxiety dominates, authority figures are accused of doing nothing but harm and dynamics are often circular in nature as grievances lead back to previously voiced frustrations. In this altered emotional situation 'the object has turned bad, cannot

be loved, and therefore destructive impulses towards it seem justified' (Klein 1980, p. 37) reinforcing the group's defensive positions. As the group develops a greater synthesis of good and bad objects represented by the emergence of an unconscious sense of guilt and attempts at reparation, the world is no longer ruled by emotions and defensive positions. Authority figures can be trusted and 'people can be loved in spite of their faults' (Klein 1980, p. 255).

Yet, Klein (1980) is quick to note, although she cannot 'give a definite answer', she feels:

> Depressive anxiety, guilt and the reparative urge are often experienced simultaneously…The conceptual distinction between depressive anxiety, guilt and reparation on the one hand, and persecutory anxiety and the defenses against it on the other, not only proves helpful in analytic work but also has wider implications (p. 36-37).

To investigate possible wider implications, I now turn for clues to political and social analysts who have explored the social function of guilt. In this discussion, I will continue to explore the role that unconscious guilt plays in the development of a collective sense of responsibility, a precursor to group action and reparation.

Thoughts from Philosophy, Political Science & Sociology

Swiss political philosopher Karl Jaspers' (1947) book *The Question of German Guilt* is often the starting point for contemporary literature's discussion of collective responsibly. He argued that the Nuremburg Trials, 'far from absolving the rest of the German people, point more clearly to their responsibility for the horrors and injustices of recent German history' (Abdel-Nour 2003, p. 693). Similarly political theorist Hannah Arendt's (1994) 1945 essay *German Guilt* details how the concept of an '*organized*' or '*group guilt*' arose during struggles to determine responsibility for World War II war crimes. Arendt wryly observed, because Hitler relied not on fanatics, murderers and sadists to carry out his work but rather 'entirely upon the normality of jobholders and family men' who 'willingly undertook any function, even that of hangman', (p. 129) the lines of responsibility had become blurred. Concerned only with his own private existence, this 'modern man of the masses' (p. 130) felt no guilt, even when forced to commit murder, because he justified it as a professional requirement. In response to these behaviors, many Germans declared that they were ashamed of being German. Arendt even confessed that sometimes she felt 'ashamed of being human' (p. 131).

Similarly, Oppenheimer (1997) examined 'a hitherto undefined modern guilt' (p.18). Distinct from forms of guilt arising out of individual 'sins of the flesh', '*modern guilt*' arises from a groups 'surprising self-corruption of having abandoned their flesh, of having deserted their human vitality' (p. 21) and humanity. In this environment, the group appears divorced from life and humanity, feeling crowded, flat and dreary. Yet, it verges on an unarticulated

violence fueled by disappointment and frustrated expectations. Individuals come to the group expecting one-ness, an immersion in boundless connection, euphoria and a sense of the infinite. Instead, they discover a familiar finite experience of dull emptiness and confinement, not boundlessness.

Collective Guilt

Necessary Conditions

'Collective guilt stems from the distress that group members experience when they accept that their ingroup is responsible for immoral actions that harmed another group' (Branscombe & Doosje 2004, p. 3). Other more innocuous causes of such guilt could be benefiting from societal privileges or other group-based inequalities, of which one may not have had any direct role in establishing, but nonetheless through which one is rewarded, such as White privilege. An important distinction is that those who feel c*ollective guilt* may not necessarily *be individually guilty*, but are implicitly connected to actual harm-doing through group history, self-categorization or social identity (Doosje et al. 1998; Gilbert 2002).

Recent research (such as Branscombe & Doosje 2004; Branscombe, Slugoski, & Kappen 2004; Doosje et al. 1998; Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead 2004; Lickel, Schmader & Barquissau 2004; Schmitt, Branscombe, & Brehm 2004) shows that there are three pre-conditions to the formation of *collective guilt*: First, people must recognize their group membership, shifting their attention from individual to group-self. Wohl and Brasncombe (2006) emphasize the central role that self-categorization as a member of the perpetrating group plays in inducing collective guilt. Second, the group must be perceived as responsible for an immoral act; and third, the act must be seen as unjustified. If the harm-doing is felt to be warranted, little *collective guilt* will result. For example, America's use of atomic weapons during WWII, killing hundreds of thousands of Japanese civilians, generated little collective guilt in the US because the actions were widely viewed as justified by Japanese attacks at Pearl Harbor and required to bring the war to an expeditious end. Therefore, it becomes clear, formation of collective guilt is dependent on two factors: an in-group accepting responsibility for the harm done to another and perceiving the actions to be unjustified.

In response to a sense of *collective guilt*, groups are often motivated to improve the situation of the harmed group, offering reparations in terms of an apology, financial restitution, or other means of making up for past wrongs (Branscombe & Doosje 2004, p. 7). For instance, Germany paid massive reparations to Israel and victims of the Holocaust, President Bill Clinton apologized in Africa for the role White Americans played in slavery, and Australia instituted a national 'Sorry Day and Week of Reconciliation' to acknowledge discrimination against Aborigines.

Under the right psychological conditions *collective guilt* may be a motivating force for social change and improvement in intergroup relations, but it will not inevitably do so. Since *collective guilt* is a group-level emotional response, how people perceive the characteristics of their group becomes salient. People who identify strongly with their own racial or national group are more inclined to deny unfavorable information about their group, justifying their group's actions as warranted, to avoid unpleasant feelings generated by *collective guilt* (Branscombe et al. 2004; Doosje et al. 2004).

Collective guilt is not the only uncomfortable emotion groups can experience when negative aspects of an inter-group relationship surface. The more self-conscious emotion of *collective shame* can also come into play.

Collective Shame Versus Collective Guilt

In contrast to *collective guilt's* roots in a sense of responsibility for unjustified acts which harmed others, 'collective shame involves being publicly exposed as incompetent, not being in control, weak, and potentially even disgusting *in the eyes of others*' (Branscombe et al. 2004, p. 29). Although guilt and shame are not always clearly distinguishable, when considered as a collective or group emotion, guilt tends to emerge when an outcome is perceived as controllable, there is a public loss of respect, and a moral responsibility for the harm-doing. In contrast, shame is often felt for negative outcomes from a less controllable cause, creating a private crisis of conscience over feelings of incompetence. In other words, groups typically feel *collective guilt* for events that they had control over and *collective shame* for outcomes that they could not control but when publicly revealed, infer weakness or inferiority (Branscombe et al. 2004; Lickel et al. 2004).

'A number of theoretical perspectives assume that emotions have a motivational character - emotions urge us to act' (Schmitt et al. 2004, p. 76). Yet guilt and shame generate very different responses. The extent to which groups feel guilty will predict their motivation to seek reparation. Yet, the extent to which groups feel *collective shame* often leads to individual attempts at disassociation. Examples include distancing oneself from one's identity groups and avoiding inter-group interactions or other situations that might prompt further shame-provoking incidents (Lickel et al. 2004, p. 47).

Of course it is possible for several emotions to be present simultaneously. 'There is a dynamic interplay between the feelings of guilt and shame that members of the group feel for their group's actions and outsiders' blame of a group' (Lickel et al. 2004, p. 50). Therefore, not only can groups feel collective guilt and shame, others may *collectively blame* them for the actions of fellow group members. 'People are then retaliated against in lieu of the

actual perpetrator', potentially creating cycles of 'vicarious retribution' in an 'escalating spiral of conflict' (Lickel et al. 2004, p.48). Yet, these emotions are likely to originate in different interpretations of group events, resulting in differing implications for people's self-concepts (Lickel et al. 2004, p. 43). Therefore, considering collective guilt, shame, and blame independently is important for a deeper understanding of group dynamics and the processes that underlie inter-group conflict and reparation.

	Psychological Roots	Group Feeling	Behavioral Marker
Collective Guilt	Sense of responsibility for unjustified acts which harmed others	Feel guilty for what was done—sense of behavioral control over the blameworthy event	Desire to make reparation
Collective Shame	Public exposure of incompetence, out of control, weak, disgusting in eyes of others	Feel ashamed for who they are—no control over actions which reflect poorly on identity group	Desire to disassociate, distance oneself from blameworthy parties &/or events
Collective Blame	Members of group blamed for the actions committed by fellow group members	Group present retaliated against in lieu of actual perpetrators	Desire to scapegoat; vicarious retribution may spur counter-retaliation creating escalating spiral of conflict

(Branscombe et al. 2004, p. 29; Lickel et al. 2004, p. 47-8)

Concluding Thoughts and Implications for Future Research

Although guilt is not a new phenomenon, Amato (1982) concludes there are three key reasons why guilt has become particularly pervasive today: First, a succession of human-induced catastrophes such as wars, depressions, and ethnic cleansings have disenfranchised entire peoples, bonding groups in a hostile marriage of victim and victimizer. The dynamics of this interrelatedness lives on in the minds of future generations, shaping thoughts and justifying actions. Examples include Northern Ireland's 'troubles' and the Middle East's 'conflicts.' Second, as large numbers of people have taken up increasingly urban,

industrialized Western ways of life, indigenous groups, rural environments and more traditional ways of living are being eclipsed around the world. Finally, life in our globalized society inundates us with difficult choices embedded in materialism. Should one purchase Nike running shoes which have been manufactured by exploiting workers in China or Starbucks coffee grown in South America? As a result, people feel increasingly fragmented as they struggle to adapt to changing roles as family members, citizens, professionals, and consumers exposing new forms of fear, shame and guilt. Considering this, it becomes apparent that 'inherent in modernization is the guilt-producing process of constant judgment and change' (p. 9). The impact of these ubiquitous guilt-producing factors will not diminish any time soon; there continues to be a need to understand the dynamics of *collective guilt* better.

Previous discussions have made it clear that guilt can be viewed as a foundational drive, a developmental push, which can motivate a group's instinctive desire to create and make reparation. If the three essential pre-conditions are met: a clearly defined group willing to accept responsibility for a harmful, unjustified act then *collective guilt* may form, orienting the group to work mode and achievement of task, such as seeking reparation to alleviate the group's depressive anxiety and guilt. Therefore, under the right conditions *collective guilt* can be a motivating force for collaboration, social change, and inter-group relations.

But what strategies might consultants or disadvantaged groups and their supporters use to facilitate the development of guilt? What organizational designs and learning approaches best facilitate the development of *collective guilt* which can then be harnessed as a motivational force for reparation? And how can *systems psychodynamics* practitioners use the group relations conference as a forum to explore the dynamics of the work group, the *space between* groups and the impact of *collective guilt* as so many have used this forum to evaluate the dynamics of *ba* groups? These questions demand further research.

Finally, nearly all of the research about collective feelings has been based in Western contexts. Research about the impact of guilt and shame in non-Western cultures also is needed to understand group dynamics more thoroughly. For example, Fessler (2004) found that shame is more prominent in Bengkulu, (Indonesia), a collectivistic culture, than in California, an individualistic culture where guilt often overshadows shame. As a result, Fessler suggests, 'a fuller understanding of shame is best arrived at through the study of collectivist cultures' (p. 207).

In this concept paper, I accepted Bion's invitation to join him in 'the exercise of disciplined curiosity' (Bion 1978, p. 23) about group behavior, establishing the centrality of *unconscious guilt* as a motivational force in groups. There are no doubt numerous forces which propel groups back to *W-mode*. Now that a theoretical foundation has been laid, more research is warranted exploring how groups get back to work.

Endnotes

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