CURRENT THINKING ON EMOTIONAL PROCESS IN SOCIETY

Katharine Gratwick Baker, PhD
Third Thursday Lecture
March 10, 2016
Overview

- Personal observations on life experience
- Definitions of Society
- Bowen’s Writings on EPS
- Work of Others on EPS
- Differentiation, Triangles, Projection, Cutoff, Multigenerational Process and Relationship to the Environment at the Societal Level
- Summary, Conclusions, Discussion
Personal Thoughts

- I am 77, the same age Bowen was when he died (he was born 25 years before me)
- Societal nodal events since I was born 1938: Internationally and nationally
- What have been my interests over 77 years?
- What patterns can be observed?
- How have they interwoven with Emotional Process in Society?
Brief Review of EPS

- Sociological definitions of “Society”
- Bowen’s Writings on EPS: Chapters 13 and 18
- Others: Pat Comella, Michael Kerr
- My interests and work
Interlocking Emotional Systems in Bowen Theory
Concepts from Bowen Theory that are Relevant to EPS

- Differentiation
- Triangles
- Projection Process
- Multigenerational Emotional Process/History
- Cutoff
Differentiation

Differentiation at the community level
Differentiation at the organizational level
Differentiation at the national level
Differentiation at the international level
PROPOSAL FOR A SOCIETAL SCALE OF DIFFERENTIATION

HUMANS AND OTHER SOCIAL MAMMALS

**KINSHIP GROUPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Togetherness/high anxiety</th>
<th>Individuality, autonomy, calm, altruism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over or underpopulation</td>
<td>Stable reproductive rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcrowding</td>
<td>Comfortable living space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect of young or overfocus on young, no preparation for mature autonomous functioning</td>
<td>Appropriate care and preparation of young for mature autonomous functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intense triangles, deceit, cheating, cutoff, conflict</td>
<td>Harmonious, balanced, open relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect of the social unit</td>
<td>Protection of the social unit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**HEALTH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excessive or inadequate care of the sick</th>
<th>Responsible care for the sick</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inordinate prolonging of life (humans)</td>
<td>Natural birthing and aging processes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ENVIRONMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment unsafe</th>
<th>Environment safe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploitation of land and resources, high risk technologies, conflicts over territory (humans)</td>
<td>Responsible stewardship of land and resources, renewable energy, recycling (humans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uneven distribution of resources</td>
<td>Even distribution of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural disasters</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### POLITICAL SYSTEMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intense anxious rigid triangles and alliances</th>
<th>Flexible triangles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence, aggression, passivity</td>
<td>Harmonious political balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership: undefined or authoritarian, reactive, anxious</td>
<td>Leadership: clearly defined and responsible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irresponsible citizenry, alienated, criminal (humans)</td>
<td>Responsible citizenry, participating in societal decisions, accepting of reasonable regulatory systems (humans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with or cutoff with neighboring social groups</td>
<td>Open harmonious relationships with neighboring social groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with or cutoff from prior generations</td>
<td>Respectful connections with prior generations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# RANGE OF OUTCOMES FOLLOWING INTERNATIONAL OR ETHNIC CONFLICT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>Chronic unbalanced conflict</th>
<th>Chronic balanced conflict</th>
<th>Unilateral external intervention</th>
<th>International intervention</th>
<th>100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genocide</td>
<td>Holocaust, Rwanda, East Timor</td>
<td>Middle East, Chechnya</td>
<td>Ireland, India/Pakistan</td>
<td>Bombing of Kosovo, Iraq</td>
<td>Berlin, Korea, Cyprus, UN troops keep the peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Togetherness</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitler</td>
<td>Yeltsin/Putin, Sharon/Arafat, Netanjahu</td>
<td>Adams/Tony Blair</td>
<td>Clinton, GWBush</td>
<td>George Marshall</td>
<td>Woodrow Wilson, Dag Hammerskjold</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Continuum of Human Functioning in the Workplace

- [SEE HANDOUT]
Continuum of Functioning for Business Organizations

- Table 5.1 Continuum of Human Functioning in the Workplace

- [SEE HANDOUT]
Examples of Triangles

- In the workplace, churches, organizations
- In Communities: *The Town That Food Saved*
- Nationally: The current political process, terrorism, religion, leaders of the Soviet Union
- Internationally: Alliances in wartime, the Cold War, terrorism, religion
Examples of the Projection Process

- In the workplace, churches, organizations: blaming lower levels in the hierarchy when anything goes wrong
- In the community: homelessness
- Nationally: treatment of Native Americans, slavery, racism, and its legacy, the New Jim Crow, the Holocaust
- Internationally: Colonialism, Islam
Examples of Cutoff

- In the workplace, churches, organizations: religious prejudice, precipitous firings, ministers leaving their churches
- In the community: police brutality, mass incarcerations, Occupy Wall Street Movement
- Nationally: Republican-Democratic divide
- Internationally: the Iron Curtain, human disconnect from the natural world
Examples of Multigenerational Process

- In the workplace, churches, organizations: emotional patterns through organizational history
- In the community: *Salem Possessed*
- Nationally: long term impact of revolutions and civil wars
- Internationally: ancient never-ending enmities such as north and south Ireland, Greece-Turkey, Sunnis-Shiites, India-Pakistan, Israeli-Palestinians (legacy of anti-semitism)
- Interactions of triangles, projection and cutoff
Human Relationship with the Natural Environment

- In the workplace, churches, and organizations:

- In the community: Three Mile Island, Love Canal, Chernobyl, Aspen, Dupont in W. Va, Flint, MI

- Nationally: Ecocide in the USSR, anti-nuclear movement, Hurricane Sandy, agricultural-industrial complex

- Internationally: The Great Famine of 1315-17, drought preceding the Syrian civil war
Additional Thoughts

- Thomas Friedman: The three largest forces on the planet are Globalization, Moore’s Law, and Mother Nature (The World is Flat)
- Global economy links all societal subgroups
- Technological explosion (Moore’s Law) and its relation to societal anxiety
- Overshoot – what’s happening to the planet (Today vs. The Great Famine in 1315)
Symptoms of Low Level EPS on a Societal Continuum

- Population explosion
- Climate change
- Famines, plagues, extinctions
- Refugee/migration crisis
- Societal anxiety expressed as moral outrage and protest
- Gun violence/mass shootings in the U.S.
- Religious extremism
- Economic extremism (the rich and the poor)
- Twitter
What Does Bowen Theory Offer?

- A framework for understanding the continuum of anxiety and reactivity at levels of human institutions beyond the family: Organizations, Communities, National, and International
- Objectifying what seems chaotic, overwhelming, and incomprehensible
- Defining the tasks of democratic leadership in response to anxiety and reactivity at the organizational, community, and wider societal level (authoritarianism and demagoguery look so much easier and more reassuring – why? Where are they on the continuum? The interaction of leaders and society).
- The challenges presented by size and heterogeneity in societal units
- Does self-management at the local and personal level matter?