ATTACK, PAIN, AND DANGER IN GROUP LIFE:

"THROWN TO THE WOLVES"

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DEDICATION

For my nephew Benjamin, and my god-daughters Maryam and Asiya – with hopes and prayers that they may grow up in a safe, caring, peaceful world.

And, above all else, for my loving partner, Michael Savino, whose gentle heart, embracing smile, and abundant warmth make it all worthwhile – and without whom this dissertation or my work would be unimaginable.
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ABSTRACT

ATTACK, PAIN, AND DANGER IN GROUP LIFE:
“THROWN TO THE WOLVES”

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This dissertation examined the process of group attack: those events when three or more members attack an individual in the small group setting. Using qualitative research with a grounded theory perspective, this study observed participants in a series of Tavistock-type self-study groups at a major university over a two-year period. The research identified three distinct perspectives on group attack: projection (i.e., scapegoating), displacement, and discarding. Data collected from the observation of the small groups indicated that those groups that used more violent language and metaphors in initial discussions later had the most extreme or dramatic group attacks. Observation data also indicated that group attack virtually always took place in the first “half” of group life — when the institutionally-designated authority was perceived to be weak, absent, or non-responsive. Groups appeared to use group attack to establish or reinstate the very authority they craved. Thus, groups “created” transgressors as a means of enforcing group norms. In addition, group attacks appeared to be driven by the members’ competition with the course’s authority figure. And, groups seemed to use group attack to create the role of a “victim” in order to compel the Consultant (professor) to assert authority. Women initiated virtually every instance of group attack observed, and were also the initial supporters in all episodes — possibly because the goals and format of Tavistock-type self-study courses privilege conventionally defined women’s interaction

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and simultaneously inhibit behavioral responses more conventionally available to men.
The data also indicated that group members from non-Western countries or cultures often
seemed to be rendered essentially invisible – particularly with respect to group attack
events. And, while this invisibility marginalized their perceived participation in group
life, it also seemed to protect the students from non-Western environments from
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Chapter One: The Research Question

The suffering which comes from [our relations to others] is perhaps more painful to us than any other. We tend to regard it as a kind of gratuitous addition, although it cannot be any less fatefully inevitable than the suffering which comes from elsewhere.

-Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents (1930)

Full humanness means full fear and trembling, at least some of the waking day.

-Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (1973)

Introduction

We spend much of our lives in small groups. We gather together and live with one another in shared houses, depending on one another for economic support, raising children, and mutually caring for one another’s health and safety. The education and socialization of our children tends to take place in other, usually larger, groups in a variety of institutions. Much of the work of the world is carried out by people who perform their activities interdependently within relatively enduring associations. In warfare, armies organized into small groups do battle with one another in groups; at other times, we seek gratification in groups through many different recreations and sports. We go from time with the family at home to time with colleagues at the office or school, to being in classes or “in a meeting,” to joining friends for social time after work. Human beings seem to be very attracted to time together in small groups.
Yet, at the very same time, we have a clear propensity for doing less-than-nice things to one another while in groups. Witness the teasing in the schoolyard, the snickering about or tormenting of a colleague in the workplace, the harassment, the slaps in the face, the punches and kicks, the brutal attacks, and the continuously escalating range of weapons available to us. All put into use when human beings attack and inflict pain on one another. What is the purpose of all of this attack and pain? How does entering into situations fraught with the dangers of ridicule, ostracism, rejection, verbal and physical attack, violence, torture, and more affect human interaction in groups? How do groups manage the pain and danger?

It is with these questions in mind that I approached this research. All of us have experienced or witnessed moments when members of a small group were attacked and subjected to painful experiences — the kind of experiences many, if not most, people work to avoid. Even though we may say that we abhor the attacks on others — and most certainly have no wish to be on the receiving end — the pain and danger of social interaction seem to persist. That men and women are essentially social creatures is a central tenet of sociological inquiry (Durkheim, 1915). While philosophers and thinkers throughout the centuries have wrestled with the question of why people hurt one another, the bottom line is that it happens. It may be, then, that attack somehow serves a purpose in the context of small group interaction.

Based on my fieldwork and research, I believe that the attack-related pain and danger are indeed a very central feature of group dynamics. In this work, I examine the conditions, causes, and manifestations of attack in group situations. How does the attack come about? What are some of its key attributes? Who are the attackers? Who are the targets of attacks? What purpose, if any, does the attack behavior serve for the group as a
whole? This research, then, explicates the ways in which attack, pain, and danger operate in the life of a group—making sense of the methods groups use to inflict, express, and subsequently manage attack behaviors.

Communication research has often examined how interaction operates, behaviors are modified, and norms are set and established communicatively (c.f., Arnst, 1996). This research in communication has focused on mass media and studies of the impact and role of "mediated" communication, on examinations of communication in face-to-face settings (c.f., Frey, 1996), and on a range of communicative strategies and styles in between. In the context of this research, I have applied some of the questions about interaction and norms to the venue of face-to-face interaction in small groups. Using the "micro" level of the small group (as opposed to mass mediated communication), this research explores the ways in which groups make use of the presence of attack, pain, and danger in social interaction.

The Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation examines the role of attack in groups and is organized into chapters covering distinct areas. This initial chapter articulates the research questions under consideration and looks at the subject population and investigation context incorporated into this study. Chapter Two provides detailed background on the extant literature and theory about attack, pain, danger, and group dynamics—to help illuminate the overall academic and intellectual context and relevance of this research. Chapter Three is an overview of the research methodology and the qualitative strategies for data collection and analysis employed in this project. Chapter Four examines the ways in which groups make manifest the presence of the danger—particularly in the form of
group attack – and looks at the relationship between the group’s language and patterns of group attack. Chapter Five looks at the phenomenon of group attack in the context of the overall developmental stages of group life. Chapter Six is an attempt to make sense of the relationship of both gender and social identity as they pertain to group attack episodes.

The Research Question

The design of this research focused particularly on this question: How do small groups use attack and the subsequent pain or danger in the group process? I began this research with the hypothesis that groups use pain and danger to enforce and maintain behavioral norms. Attacking and hurting individual members, I hypothesized, was a way for the group to make known which behaviors are acceptable and which are considered transgressive.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I am using “pain,” “danger,” and “attack” in an interrelated way to mean the following:

- **Pain** is the sensation of distress or suffering when one feels emotionally hurt; the pain can cause great anxiety, anguish, sorrow, grief, etc. In groups, pain can stem from rejection, ridicule, verbal attack, ostracism, and silencing. Pain can be self-reported verbally, or manifested through displays of emotion (e.g., tears, screaming).

- **Danger** is the notion or dread of impending or potential pain – the awareness that some situation or behavior can possibly or likely cause harm (c.f., Alford, 1999). Or, to borrow from Tillich’s notion of fear, awareness of danger is “being afraid of something, a pain, the rejection by a person or a group, the loss of something or somebody, the

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1 The context of this research is a graduate seminar at a prominent university; there are no instances of physical violence in the data. Thus, pain resulting from physical assault is not addressed in this research. There are a few instances of self-reported expressions of physical sensations of pain (e.g., illness, headaches, etc.) and, where appropriate, those are incorporated into the analysis of manifestations of pain in group life.
moment of dying” (1952: 37). Because the sense of danger reflects an awareness of pain, it is made manifest through self-report.

- To attack is to verbally set upon an individual or individuals, using speech or writing to criticize, injure, or cause pain. Attack implies taking the initiative in a verbal struggle or assault, and suggests an attempt to overpower by the suddenness or intensity of the onslaught. In groups, attack is made manifest through the words and behavior of individuals.

In articulating the research question, I felt that it was important to give voice to all three concepts because it is my belief that it is not just the attack and attack-related pain themselves that affects group dynamics, but also the group and individual awareness of the possibility of receiving or inflicting pain that is crucial.

What is a “Small Group”?

The lexicographic roots of the word “group” point in two distinct directions — each relevant for the current subject matter. From the ancient Germanic, “group” is derived from “crop,” a bird’s gizzard — within which is an amalgamation of digested matter, no longer possessing the discrete nature of individual items but “clumped together to form a fibrous mass” (Pines, 1994: 53). The word’s Latin root, on the other hand, presents “grouping” as a dynamic procedure, thus referring to “objects which are actively grouped together in order to display an organisational principle” (Pines, 1994: 54). These two facets of the word — both passive and active — help shape our current, familiar understanding(s) of the concept of small group.

Many social science theorists have posited definitions of groups. For Lewin, one of the “fathers” of small group studies, a “group is best defined as a dynamic whole based on interdependence rather than on similarity” (Emphasis added. 1948: 184). For Bales, defining with a researcher’s precision, a group is:
... any number of persons engaged in interaction with each other in a single face-to-face meeting or series of meetings, in which each member receives some impression or perception of each other member distinct enough so that he or she can, either at the time or in later questioning, give some reaction to each of the others as an individual person, even though it be only to recall that the other person was present. (1950: 33).

Alderfer (1977), meanwhile, echoes Lewin’s notion of interdependence and Bales’ concept of self-perception of group members, and incorporates these concepts into his definition of a group as a:

... collection of individuals: a) who have significantly interdependent relations with each other; b) who perceive themselves as a group by reliably distinguishing members from nonmembers; c) whose group identity is recognized by nonmembers; d) who have differentiated roles in the group as a function of expectation from themselves, other members and nongroups; and e) who as group members acting alone or in concert have significantly interdependent relations with other groups. (In Wells, 1985: 109).

Shaw (1981), after reviewing more than 80 different definitions of a group, argued that a group is “defined as two or more persons who are interacting with one another in such a manner that each person influences and is influenced by each other person” (1981: 8). A year later, Hare (1982) attempted a more complex, inclusive framework; he described a fully functioning small group as one whose members are committed to a set of values that define the overall pattern of activity, have accumulated or generated the resources necessary for the task at hand, have worked out an appropriate form of role differentiation and developed a sufficient level of morale for the task, and have sufficient control in the form of leadership to coordinate the use of resources by the members playing their roles in the interest of the groups’ values.

Trying to inject what he calls a “common sense” approach into these more “technical” perspectives, Powles presents his “reality check ... [outlining] what ordinary
people think about groups” (1996: 142) and identifies five key points about groups: (1) Humans are highly social animals and as a matter of course join or form groups; (2) Humans have an instinctive belief that groups are indeed “real” entities; (3) It can take some time to form a group, or to feel like a genuine member of the group; (4) Leaders, either formal or informal, are needed for the group to function; and (5) Groups have collective (and at times confused) goals, temperaments, and motivations (Powles, 1996: 142).

Very recently, Arrow, McGrath, and Berdahl (2000) articulated some of the same assumptions in more research-oriented language, and conceptualized a group as:

... a loosely coupled (Weick, 1995) system of mutually interacting, interdependent members, projects, and technology with a shared collective identity (see McGrath, 1984). Groups have temporal and psychological boundaries; group members are aware of the group as an entity and of their membership in it; and members’ behavior is linked and interdependent, with shared consequences. (2000: 4).

They make explicit that they are not including people who occupy a particular social classification (e.g., Irish, or male, or urban poor) where the individuals within that classification do not all interact directly and interdependently with one another. In addition, Arrow and her colleagues – building on research such as that conducted by Schmitt, Dube, and Leclerc (1992) – consciously exclude collections of people in the same “space” but who are not interacting with one another or experiencing some kind of shared identity (e.g., individuals waiting in a line, or in a subway car together, or the people sitting on the left side of a movie theater).

Farmer and Roth (1998), focusing more on explicitly-organized work groups in their overall notions of “small group,” define it as “a collection of individuals who are task-interdependent, who share one or more goals and the responsibility for their
fulfillment, and who see themselves (and are seen by others) as an intact social entity embedded in a larger organizational setting.” And, in their examination of the impact of diversity on work group processes and performance, Shaw and Barrett-Power (1998: 1309) build on Guzzo and Dickson’s (1996) notions, and use the term “group” to refer to small collectives of individuals ... who have the opportunity for significant, meaningful interaction with one another. These groups, whether social or work-related are “made up of individuals who see themselves and are seen by others as a social entity, who are interdependent because of the tasks they perform as members of the group, who are embedded in one or more larger social systems ... and who perform tasks that affect others” (Shaw and Barrett-Power (1998: 1309).

In reviewing these various definitions of small groups, we can see that Bales; Shaw; Arrow, et al.; and Shaw and Barrett-Power work to define groups as those units of individuals sharing a particularly defined space and time (although not necessarily on a continuous or even on-going basis) so that each can have direct, face-to-face impact on others. In addition, some of the definitions above (e.g., Arrow, McGrath, & Berdahl, 2000; Farmer & Roth, 1998; Shaw & Barrett-Power, 1998) focus on the concept that a small group has a “shared identity.” In other words, the members implicitly or explicitly understand that they are part of a particular group.3

For the purposes of this research, I have used a modified version of Bales’ and Shaw’s definitions, incorporating Lewin and Alderfer’s notions of interdependence

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2 Examples might include: the members of a church choir who meet in the church basement for regular rehearsals; the boys who gather in the vacant lot to play ball; the secretaries who make sure to go out for lunch together.

3 These combined notions of face-to-face interaction and shared identity distinguish the “small group” from broader social entities and from social psychology’s highly related concept of a “network” or “society.” This is not to say that there is not a relationship between understanding the dynamics of a small group of people sharing a particular space and time and the dynamics of broader, interpersonal networks; in reality, the distinction between the two may be thought of as a sociological discrimination between the micro and the macro.
among members, along with Arrow, Berdahl, & McGrath’s concept of shared identity (although not necessarily requiring Farmer & Roth’s idea that group members must be seen by others to be considered a group entity), to define a small group as follows:

_A small group exists when a collection of individuals interact with one another in face-to-face gatherings, each member consciously aware of the presence and identity of all others present, where each individual can influence and be influenced by the others, when all members continue to have significantly interdependent relations with each other, and where all group members share an awareness of the group as a distinct entity and of their membership in it._

I believe this definition provides a solid foundation for the dissertation research, operationalizing the basic entity with which I am working; it builds on the various definitions proposed over several decades to craft one which best identifies the kinds of groups under study.

**The Research Context**

**The Study Population**

The subjects of this research were participants in a graduate course on “Small Group Processes” (Psychology 601) taught at a large, prestigious university in a northeastern U.S. city. The research data was collected between 1994 and 2001. See Chapter 3 for details about the dates and composition of the groups studied.

- It is a course specifically devoted to teaching about group processes and providing students an opportunity to examine their own behavior in groups; as such, it was an excellent vehicle for examining the details and nuances of
face-to-face interaction without the need to focus on another “task” (e.g., workgroup production, therapy, socializing, decision-making, etc.). In the context of self-study groups such as Psych 601, Bion’s (1961) “basic assumptions” (powerful emotional drives which interact with the work-related group functions; see Chapter Two for in-depth discussion) are concretely manifested — “breaking through,” as Miller (1998) says — and open to scrutiny and analysis (c.f., Lion and Gruenfeld, 1993). In fact, a primary purpose of programs such as Psych 601 is the examination of these basic assumptions that usually remain unexplored in most group situations (Obholzer, 1994).

- Not only is Psych 601 about the process of studying group dynamics, but more particularly, the entire reason for the existence of the small groups under study – the very reason they are formed and interact – is in order to produce effects that allow members to engage in self-study.

- Because by its very nature a group dynamics self-study course such as Psych 601 induces anxiety among the participants (Gabriel, 1998; Voyer, Gould, & Ford, 1997), emotions and actions are heightened and exaggerated during the intensity of the group experience – throwing into greater relief the very dynamics under study (Debbane, 1995; Kuriloff, Babad, & Kline, 1988; Smith & Berg, 1987; Stein, 2000).

- Educational programs such as Psych 601 have an accepted history and built-in practice of researchers and Observers collecting data about the group behavior and experience. “From the beginning, research has been woven into the fabric” of the kind of experiential learning involved in group dynamics self-
study courses (Yalom, 1976: 491) since the advent of Kurt Lewin’s first group process programs (Moreland, 1996; Smith & Comer, 1994; Zaleznik, 1995).

- Each class consists of people coming together for the first time; thus, it did not require the researcher to find a way to become familiar with the history and patterns and dynamics of an already-existing group. The Observer/Researcher is basically as familiar with the group as the group members are; as such, the researcher and the group itself learn about their identity and composition simultaneously.

- The time-bounded nature of self-study groups such as Psych 601 allows each small group to be aware of the starting and finishing times of the group life (i.e., the group’s “birth” and “death”) – and thus examine the interaction at various stages in a group’s development (cf., LaCoursiere, 1980; Slater, 1966). Thus, it represents a concentrated yet comprehensive time period for the study of group dynamics.

- Even though each group is newly formed within the context of the course being offered in a given semester, Psychology 601 itself has a 30-year history at the university. The basic premises and fundamental framework for group dynamics self-study courses such as Psych 601 are derived from more than 50 years of group dynamics theory and practice (Lipgar, 1992). Because each Psych 601 class is run with the same basic methodology, developed and enhanced over many years, they provide highly comparable group experiences for examination.
**Psych 601: The course in “Small Group Processes”**

Psych 601 is open only to graduate students. Most of the students come from two of the university’s graduate programs: the School of Education and the Business School. Some students also come from various other graduate/professional departments or schools, including the Medical School, the Dental School, the Communication department, and the Law School.

Rather than providing classroom hours throughout the semester (e.g., two hours every Thursday morning, or Mondays and Wednesdays from 3:00 pm to 4:30 pm), Psych 601 conducts the semester’s classroom hours entirely during an intensive four-day *conference* (Thursday through Sunday, 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.). The remainder of the semester offers opportunities for consultation with faculty and preparation and submission of academic papers. Prior to the four-day conference, students read about the theoretical foundations of group processes and experiential learning. They can draw upon this during the course and are expected to interpret their data (i.e., their own experience during the conference) with support from the theoretical perspectives.

When they enroll for the course (Psych 601 is one of the few courses that is a permission-only course requiring *in-person* enrollment), students are given a letter from the course’s Senior Professor/Director describing the course’s basic framework, requirements and four major components:

- The first is an unstructured group experience focusing on interpersonal and group experiences. Through the study of their own behavior, participants have the opportunity to learn about the nature of authority and

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5 In this way, students in programs such as Psych 601 can benefit from a period of concentrated, experiential learning (Kuriloff, Babad, & Kline, 1988). One of the Psych 601’s founding professors wrote that until the mid-1980’s, Psych 601 met “biweekly throughout an academic semester” (Kuriloff, et al, 1984: 188). The four-day, intensive format, however, is more in line with the standard model of other experiential group dynamics learning (cf., Agazarjan, 1999).
responsibility, anxiety, communications, the evolution of norms, and the underlying assumptions which often govern group development. It is our experience that the amount students learn in the course is directly related to the amount of effort they put into making meaning of this experiential component. Membership in each group will be established through random assignment blocked [categorized] for gender and any other salient intergroup differences that happen to appear (such as age, race, school or program). The second component is a substantial set of readings. During the course, you should keep a journal recording your thoughts and feelings about group events (you can write it in breaks, before or after sessions, and in the evening). The third component of the course involves intergroup events. By comparing and contrasting the behavior of each group, members of the conference have an opportunity to learn what is specific to their group and what may be more universal. They also can study intergroup phenomena such as cooperation and competition. The fourth component is members in a Small Task Group. The purpose of this component is to help you learn how having a specific with a deadline and collective responsibility for a product affects group dynamics and is effected by them. Membership in these groups will be determined by the members of the small group(s). (Director’s letter, December, 1996).

Goals of Psych 601.

In many ways, the structure of the course is like a social sciences version of a laboratory course offered in fields such as Chemistry and Physics. Using the Chemistry and Physics analogy, though, it is important to recognize that in the science lab courses, the students themselves are not the "reagents." In the context of Psych 601, the students are both the researchers and the source material. Students are given a theoretical framework within which to understand how certain elements of group dynamics interact (the required class readings). They are then given an opportunity in the laboratory setting in which they can observe the interactions (e.g., between acid and another substance) and make sense of their findings with reference to a body of theory that pertains to the laboratory experience. The four-day conference is like the laboratory time, wherein participants collect data (their own experience); in the period following the conference,
they write analyses of the interaction they experienced and observed. The course requires
that each student submit two analytical papers, incorporating both the data from the
course experience and the theoretical literature about various aspects of group dynamics.

As articulated in a handout (the “charge sheet,” see sample in Appendix 1)
distributed to all participants at the beginning of the conference, the course’s primary
purpose is to provide an opportunity for students to learn about group dynamics. Thus,
the opportunity includes examining the nature of authority and responsibility,
communication patterns, the uses of power, evolving roles and norms, and the underlying
assumptions which often govern small group behavior. The course also provides an
opportunity to consider how various social identities and dynamics between groups affect
group behavior.

Structure of the course.

Psych 601 focuses primarily on the dynamics of small groups. Depending on
total enrollment, several groups may run simultaneously. Each group is composed of 10-
15 members, plus one or two Consultants, the standard term used for the
professors/facilitators/leaders of group dynamics self-study groups such as Psych 601
(c.f., Alford, 1995; Kraus, 1997; Kuriloff & Santoro, 1988; Lipgar, 1993b; Smith &
Comer, 1994; Zaleznik, 1995). The bulk of the time during the four day Psych 601
conference is devoted to the Small Groups, whose purpose is “to further the primary
purpose of the course by providing opportunities for members to study their own
behavior in the here and now” (charge sheet – see Appendix 1). There are four or five
Small Group sessions each day, each session lasting approximately one hour (Appendix 2

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6 As described above, students in Psych 601 are somewhat randomly assigned to groups; the course does,
however, try to make sure that there is some kind of “balance” of various social identities (race, gender,
school/department) within each group.
Chapter 1

provides a sample schedule for a four-day conference). Between sessions, members have a 20-30 minute break during which they have an opportunity to write in their journals. In addition to the Small Group sessions and the breaks, there is one other event each day: either an "intergroup event" or a "thematic event."

The Psych 601 intergroup event is a 60-minute session during which all Small Groups come together in one room to compare and contrast their experiences with those of members of the other group (Charge sheet). Usually, the intergroup event is held on the first and fourth days of the conference (i.e., Thursday and Sunday). The 60-minute thematic event is usually held on the second and third days of the conference (i.e., Friday and Saturday). During this event, the members of the conference as a whole (all the Small Groups) are given an opportunity to subdivide into groups focused on particular topics. Topics address a range of group issues, typically including authority, anxiety, norms, gender, race, power, and sexuality, and how these issues affect group behavior.

Friday and Saturday evenings (Days 2 and 3), Psych 601 members watch movies that relate to group dynamics or intergroup behavior. On Friday evenings, Twelve Angry Men, a 1957 film about the deliberations of a jury in a murder trial, was shown. The Saturday evening film for most of the courses in this research was The Long Walk Home, about the relationships between a white woman, her husband, her African-American maid, and various segments of their community during the 1950's bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama. During one of the semesters in 1995, the course showed Crimson Tide (1995) as the Saturday night film.7

7 Leonard Maltin's 1996 Movie and Video Guide describes these films as follows:
Chapter I

The other two primary components of the Psych 601 conference take place at the very beginning and end. As the conference opens, all members and staff gather in one of the large meeting rooms. In this session, the conference Director introduces the conference, its purpose and format, presents the staff (Consultants, Co-Consultants, and Observers – roles described below), and discusses what makes this course different from most others in the students’ collective academic experience. During this session, the Director reviews some of the “ground rules” for the conference:

- **Confidentiality:** Students may say anything they like about their own experience in the conference, or anything they like about the Consultants. However, they are not to mention the name or describe the behavior of any member of their small group outside the membership of the small group.\(^8\)

- The Psych 601 conference is an *academic inquiry* into the social psychological dynamics of small groups and is *not* group psychotherapy, as Horwitz (1995) indicates when talking about group dynamics self-study programs in general. The course can also be an anxiety-producing experience.

As such, anyone undergoing any undue stress that might compound the

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*The Long Walk Home* (1990). Director: Richard Pearce. Principal Cast: Sissy Spacek, Whoopi Goldberg, Dwight Schultz, Ving Rhames, Dylan Baker. Perceptive, extremely well-acted account of the life and changing times in the segregated American south of the mid-1950's. The focus is on the consciousness-raising of Spacek, a privileged pillar of Southern womanhood; Goldberg is her hard-working housekeeper, who’s struggling to help support her own family. Fine sense of period detail; most intriguing of all, John Cork’s script mirrors the connections between feminism and the civil rights movement.

*Crimson Tide* (1995). Director: Tony Scott. Principal Cast: Denzel Washington, Gene Hackman, Matt Craven, George Dzundza. The producer-director team that brought you *Top Gun* fashioned this macho power-play saga aboard a Navy nuclear-submarine. Tensions run high when the U.S. is pushed to the brink of war with Russia, especially when veteran sub commander Hackman starts showing Capt. Queeg tendencies and his new lieutenant (Washington) tries to assert himself. Obvious, to be sure, with a foregone conclusion blunting some of the suspense, but highly entertaining just the same.

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\(^8\) Students can, of course, talk about other group members in their journals and in the papers they write. The journals are not designed to be read by anyone; the papers are read only by the Consultants or other members of the Small Group.
ordinary stress of the course was asked to reconsider their enrollment or talk with the Director or their Small Group Consultant before the start of the initial Small Group session. Undue stress could mean, for example, losing a loved one recently, breaking up with a lover or a spouse, suffering from a serious illness, or taking psychopharmacological drugs for the treatment of a psychiatric illness. Students are asked to complete and sign an “Informed Consent” form (see Appendix 3) indicating their understanding of this.

- Students are informed that they are expected to show up for every session or they risk failing the course.

After the final Small Group session on the fourth day, there is one other conference-related activity: the Question and Answer session. In this activity, members stay with their Small Group and Consultant(s) – although the chairs are re-organized (usually around a central table) so that the room no longer resembles the space in which the Small Group has met and worked for the four days. During this final hour, the focus is no longer on the “here and now,” the expression used in group dynamics self-study programs (Roethlisberger, 1977). This Question and Answer session is an opportunity for members to ask questions about the overall process of the course and about the roles and educational strategies of the Consultants and the conference as a whole. It is also an opportunity for students to clarify issues pertaining to the two analytical papers they are required to write as part of the course.

*The Conference Staff*

Psych 601’s staff is composed of several “layers” of personnel, each with distinct authority, responsibility, and roles. The overall responsibility for the conference as a whole lies with the Senior Professor (known as the Director). The Director may also be
one of the Consultants for a Small Group. The Director, in turn, hires Consultants ("professors" or "instructors" in the university's lingo) who are each responsible for one of the Small Groups. The Consultant is responsible for the work of his or her Small Group and grades all papers submitted by students from their particular Small Group.

"Consultant" is the designation used in the group dynamics experiential learning tradition for "one who [has] immersed himself or herself in the emotional life of the group, while standing outside the group, using his or her knowledge of group psychology to interpret his or her experience of the group to the group" (Alford, 1995: 127). Smith and Comer describe the self-study group Consultant as the one who "plays a key role ... in helping the group to crystallize its basic assumptions" (1994: 561). Thus, the Consultant helps the self-study group to engage with and make sense of the complexity of group life by taking up what has been called an "interpretive stance" (Shapiro & Carr, 1991).

Psych 601 Consultants may choose to work with a Co-Consultant in their Small Group. The Co-Consultant role is essentially one of a Consultant-in-training – preparing people to become Consultants in their own right. It is an opportunity for the Psych 601 conference Director and Consultants to have a better sense of the skills of a particular Co-Consultant. In addition, some Consultants find it easier and better to have a "partner" in their work in the Small Group, someone with whom to check impressions, share responsibilities, and someone who may see things the Consultant did not, or see them from a different perspective.

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9 Alford goes on to establish the very important distinction between a Consultant in the Tavistock tradition and the more conventional understanding of a therapist in group psychology: "Although the consultant presumably has more knowledge about group process than members, it is only the consultant's ability to feel the life of the group that allows him or her to make the knowledge relevant to the group. Seen from this perspective, the difference between 'consultant' and 'therapist' is one of degree, not kind, the consultant more concerned with group process than promoting individual transformation" (1995: 127).
Chapter 1

The next "tier" of the staff structure in Psych 601 is the Observers. The Observers are graduate students taking Psychology 701, a course in "Advanced Group Processes." Depending on the overall number of Small Groups, the number of Observers, and the Observers' interests, the students in Psych 701 may divide up to observe the various Small Groups, or together observe one Small Group. Some Small Groups may have no Observers; others may have anywhere from one to four Observers. The Observers sit behind a table in a corner of the room where the Small Group is taking place. Group members are told in the Director's introductory letter and during the Introduction session that the Observers are students from the Advanced Group Process course. In addition to observing the Small Group sessions, the Observers have the additional responsibility of observing and reporting to the staff on all Intergroup and Thematic Events. Consultants and Co-Consultants are not present for those events.

Throughout the Psych 601 conference, the students have regular 30-minute breaks after every Small Group session or conference event. Part of this break time is provided so that members may write in their journals. The remainder of the time is for the members to take a break from the work of the sessions. During these breaks, the Psych 601 staff meet to discuss group dynamics and continue their work. Typically, the Consultant for each Small Group meets with his or her Co-Consultant and Observers (if any). All of the Conference staff, including the Director, may also meet for some of the time during the breaks. During the Psych 601 Intergroup and Thematic Events, the Consultants and Co-Consultants are discussing overall conference issues. After each day's work, the staff again meet to review the day's work and issues (see sample

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10 The conference has tried, at times, to have the Observers sit in another room to observe the Small Group session behind a two-way mirror. Problems with the sound system and obstructed views, however, usually made it easier and more fruitful for the Observers to sit in the same room as the Small Group.
schedule in Appendix 2). Thus, Psych 601 conference staff have very little “down time” during the four-day set of events.

*What actually happens in the course?*

The Psychology 601 conference derives from the original Tavistock approach to learning in groups (see Chapter Two) – and the conference Director refers to himself as “loosely Tavistockian in his approach” (Kuriloff et al, 1988: 211). Thus, as a group dynamics experiential learning program, the conference provides learning opportunities by constructing “situations in which the task given to the members is to study their own behavior as it happens” (Rice, 1975: 72). This emphasis on the “here-and-now data” (Roethlisberger, 1977: 223) in self-study groups is crucial (c.f., Gutmann et al., 1997; Kolb, 1984). Psych 601 is not about discussing theories of group dynamics or stages of group development as others have written about or envisioned them. It is also not about discussing members’ various experiences in other groups (e.g., at work, at home). Instead, it is about examining how the group itself is behaving or going through various stages.

After the Psych 601 Introductory session there is a break, following which members go to the first session of the Small Group. This session – and all subsequent Psych 601 Small Group sessions – takes place in a seminar-sized room with all chairs in a circle; one chair for each member and for the Consultant(s) are pre-set in each room. At

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11 Tavistock is a reference to the tradition of experiential group dynamics training developed in the U.K. following World War II. While Psych 601 derives from the Tavistock model, it deviates somewhat from strict Tavistockian structure. The role of the Consultant(s) in Psych 601 is usually less rigid than in a traditional Tavistock conference. In addition, a Tavistock conference typically provides a range of group-type activities (e.g., small groups, large groups, application groups) – each with the support of different members of the Consultancy. In Psych 601, however, the focus is primarily on processes in small groups – and the conference members spend the vast majority of their time in their small groups or reflecting on aspects of their small group experiences. Despite these structural differences, the overall goals and methodology of a traditional Tavistock conference and Psych 601 are very similar.
the appointed starting time for the Small Group session, the Consultant enters, sits down in the remaining chair, states that “the purpose of the Small Group is to provide members an opportunity to study their own behavior in the here and now” and becomes silent. Instead of making eye contact with the membership or looking around the circle, the Consultant looks down at the floor. Typically, the group members are confused and wait for the Consultant to say or do more. When it becomes apparent that the Consultant is not planning to say anything more at that point, the group members usually try to figure out what they “should” do next. The role of the Consultants is to offer here-and-now interpretations about the dynamics of the group – to help further the group’s learning; otherwise, the Consultants rarely speak.12 In the context of Tavistock-type self-study programs in general, when Consultants do speak, they generally use the third person, concentrating on group-as-a-whole interventions (Alford, 1995; Kuriloff & Santoro, 1988; Smith & Comer, 1994). If and when a group in an experiential learning program such as Psych 601 rebels against the authority structure (cf., Babad & Amir, 1978; Bennis & Shepard, 1956), the Consultants shift into a more interactive, interpersonal (i.e., addressing individuals and not just the group as a whole) mode. Thus, the Small Group experience is underway.

Everything within an experiential learning group dynamics conference such as Psych 601 is structured to facilitate the learning about group dynamics. A fundamental aspect of this structure is the perceived lack of structure – particularly in comparison with virtually every other academic experience participants have encountered before. The

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12 As the group progresses and begins to do the work of discussing the group dynamics in the “here and now,” the Consultant’s behavior shifts. Throughout all of this, the Consultant’s job is to remain attuned to the group’s process and work to help the group members make sense of the interactional process and the various group events and dynamics.
Psych 601 conference staff create an overall structure for the course (registration, group membership, schedule, room assignments, required readings and term papers), but much of the other aspects of a Tavistock-type self-study group dynamics conference remains for the membership to create their own structure and processes (c.f., Lipgar, 1993a). As Rice sees it, the staff in a group dynamics conference like that of Psych 601 put in place four main “boundary controls”:

- the total conference institution — visitors are admitted only under very special conditions, and no reports are ever made on individual members;
- the events — the primary task of each is defined, and one event is not allowed to overlap into another; staff roles — staff stay ‘in role’ and do not carry one into another; and time — events start and stop on time so that members know for how long the study of behavior will last, and for how long staff will maintain particular roles. (Rice, 1975: 72).

With these four boundaries (the institution of the conference, the events, the staff roles, and the time structure) in place — and conference staff work hard to maintain the boundaries at all times — members of an experiential learning group dynamics conference are free to work out their own rules and systems for behavior and interaction without the presupposed social structures typically in place for most social and interpersonal situations (Zaleznik, 1995).

These boundaries, in addition, contribute to the heightened sense of emotion or “potency” in the group experience — as distinct from other group situations. Despite the highly structured nature of Psych 601 — made explicit in all course-related materials and sessions — for the participants, the conference is like other group dynamics self-study programs and is typically “a situation where turbulence or near chaos conditions are experienced” (Smith & Comer, 1994: 560). As Kenwyn Smith and David Berg argue in *Paradoxes of Group Life*, the boundaries drawn by the conference staff in a program such
as Psych 601 increase the “potency of the emotions that members are confronted with” and they

get to experience the major consequences, constructive and destructive, of having boundaries tightly articulated. In most group situations, the external boundaries are drawn with sufficient permeability that unwanted parts of the group can be pushed outside. When this is experienced as not possible, the group finds itself face to face with elements of itself that it may not like and is confronted with the idea of dealing with them in ways that it would never encounter in ordinary circumstances. Likewise, the groups are not free to import things, such as distractions, from the outside. (Smith & Berg, 1987: 107).

For Smith and Berg, these unwanted parts may be unpleasant emotions (e.g., anger, jealousy, sadness), or perhaps undesirable thoughts or attitudes (e.g., racist, sexist, homophobic, or other viewpoints of prejudice; sexual desires; competition). The distractions that groups may import include things like political discussion, gossip, and a focus on the task. The boundaries of group dynamics self-study conferences help prevent unwanted or difficult emotions from “fleeing” the small group, bringing the members face-to-face with the potentially thorny affect and the challenge of making sense of it (Smith & Berg, 1987). Feeling somewhat like the prep-school boys on the deserted island in Lord Of The Flies (Golding, 1955), members of Tavistock-type conferences get to encounter the various roles and components of group life — and the way in which the creation and implementation of these components plays out in their very interaction.13

The comparison with the Lord Of The Flies is apt: members in Tavistock-type self-study group will feel adrift and abandoned by those they traditionally perceive as their leaders (i.e., the Consultants). Because of the unfamiliar behavior of the “teachers,” members of such groups perceive “early group life as threatening or unsafe” (Kraus,

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[13] Lord Of The Flies (Golding, 1955) is one of Psych 601’s required readings.
1997: 132) — and their increasing anxiety will lead them to more intense manifestations of Bion's (1961) “basic assumption” behaviors.

This violation of previous experiences as to how groups are led produces stress concerning individual identity and group survival. While identity stress is high (Where is my place in this group? Will I be accepted? Will I have influence?), the early remarks generally deal with concern for group survival. Is the trainer testing us? Will he lead us if we flounder? If he won’t lead us, who will? How would he do it? Do we want him to? (Bradford, 1975: 115).

The resulting anxiety can heighten sensation and awareness — and members have the opportunity to learn from the ways in which anxiety is created, managed, suppressed, expressed, and controlled.14 The staff of Tavistock-type experiential learning programs create the overall conference structure and the members generate the “data” for examination and learning (Lipgar, 1993b). As Rice writes about experiential group relations training, “everything that happens in the conference, therefore, whether by design or accident, is material for study” (Rice, 1975: 73). The group members of Psych 601, thus, have this opportunity and material to further their own learning about group dynamics; and the researcher examining the Psych 601 conference has the opportunity observe the life-cycle of a small group in its emotional intensity and entirety.

**Generalizability**

A key question in developing this dissertation was whether and how the Psych 601 groups are generalizable to other small groups. Some involved in creating and implementing Tavistock-type self-study groups have argued that these groups represent

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14 The learning takes place both within the small group experience itself and in the required term papers. In addition to showing up at every small group session, the course requires two analytical papers from each student, integrating both data (derived from their own small group experience) and the applicable group dynamics literature.
or mirror groups and social situations outside the confines of the group (cf., Golembiewski & Blumberg, 1977; Jacques, 1998; Loveridge, 1998; Miller, 1990b). The reality, however, is more complex. Psych 601 has characteristics that distinguish it from other, naturally-occurring small groups, including the fact that the authority figure behaves in an intentionally aberrant fashion designed to heighten anxiety. Additionally, the group is inherently self-referential; in other words, it is a group that has come together for the primary purpose of studying its own behavior. While many other groups in society may be artificially constructed for a particular reason (e.g., juries, workplace task forces), it is not typical for those groups to have introspective analysis as their reason for existence.

Psych 601 is part of the larger Tavistock tradition of experiential learning in group dynamics. It seems plausible that the Psych 601 small groups could be generalizable to Tavistock groups operating with a similar structural framework and set of functional conditions. But, are groups within the Tavistock tradition generalizable to the “real world?” Do these contrived groups with aberrantly-behaving authority figures and self-referential tasks resemble something beyond other contrived self-study groups? Do Tavistock-type groups have social morphologies similar to groups in settings that are not contrived for the purpose of producing such groups? Or, are the self-study groups in the Tavistock tradition an example of structures developed to achieve a certain result in fact leading to that result? If so, presumed connections to other, more naturalistic small group conditions are much harder to elucidate.

The field of social psychology has a certain history and tradition of the kind of research work that has some parallels with the Psych 601 framework. Some of the experimental social psychology research, in particular, has involved the artificial
construction of social interaction for the specific purpose of testing, elaborating, or
demonstrating a theoretical proposition. These studies, like the groups in Psych 601 and
others in the Tavistock tradition, manipulate some of the interactional parameters (as
Psych 601 has the authority figure behaving in an aberrant fashion) in order to examine
the consequent behavior. Two notable experimental social psychology studies, Stanley
Milgram’s classic15 “obedience to authority” research (1968, 1974) – and its many
successors in the decades since16 – and Philip Zimbardo’s 1971 “Stanford Prison
Experiment” (Zimbardo et al, 2000; Zimbardo & White, 1972) represent modes of social
interaction to which the Psych 601 groups could possibly be generalizable.

*The Milgram and Zimbardo studies*

In the Milgram studies, subjects were asked to give electric shocks to presumed
“learners” in the experiment (actually, the researcher’s confederates); Milgram, then,
studied the subjects’ willingness to obey the authority of the lab-coated researcher in
administering the successively more intense and more painful shocks despite the painful
cries of the role-playing confederate “learner” (cf., Blass, 2000; Helm & Morelli, 1985;
Mandel, 1998; Milgram, 1968, 1974; Miller, 1995; Takooshian, 2000). Milgram’s
research has been used to argue that some people are willing to obey commands from
someone in authority, even when they believe that their obedience will result in causing
harm to an innocent individual. And, in the context of the decades following the Nazi
atrocities of World War II, writers have drawn upon Milgram’s research to shed some

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15 Miller (1995) writes that “the obedience experiments are familiar not only to all introductory
psychology students, but to most educated people in the Western world” (1995: 34). He later says that
“the Milgram obedience research has witnessed a number of well-documented internecine crises in
social psychology over the span of several decades, only to remain virtually unchallenged in the sheer
amount of space given to it in contemporary textbooks” (1995: 40).

16 Experiments similar to Milgram’s own – with similar results – have been conducted throughout the
U.S., and in Germany, Italy, Australia, Jordan, and other countries (Volpato & Contarello, 1999).
light on an individual’s willingness to go against what she/he believes is right and instead obey commands from an authority figure – supporting the “assertion that ordinary men might actively contribute to acts of extermination and genocide” (Volpato & Contarello, 1999: 242).

Zimbardo’s now-famous 1971 “Stanford Prison Experiment” enrolled college undergraduates to play the randomly-assigned roles of prison inmate or prison guard in a planned social psychology simulation of prison life. Conditions in the simulated prison became so “realistic” and intense that the experimenters themselves even ended up adopting the mentality of corrections officials rather than scientific researchers (e.g., believing that the inmates were simply malingering, and that additional or more extreme punishments would correct behavioral problems). One week into the experimental simulation, because of the intervention of a psychologist who had not been connected to the experiment from the beginning (she was a colleague of the research team, called in to conduct some interviews with both inmates and guards and was appalled by the cruel behavior of the guards and by the distraught mental states of the prisoners), the experiment was halted. Similar to Milgram’s experiments, Zimbardo’s research was used to support the argument that otherwise good people can be induced to do evil to other good people in situations where the institutions, structures, policies, roles, and belief-systems of the context approve.

*Generalizing from Psych 601?*

What is the relevance of these studies to this dissertation research observing group behavior in the context of Psych 601? An important dimension of the Milgram and Zimbardo research is that, within these studies, the conditions to produce certain kinds of interaction are created and implemented. These, then, are groups or contexts for social
interaction constructed for the purpose of producing behaviors to test theory. And, while Psych 601 is not an experimental condition, the Director and the Consultants not conducting research, and the students enrolled in the course not experimental subjects, the Tavistock-type self-study groups such as Psych 601 are indeed groups constructed to examine particular aspects of social interaction, particularly through the deliberate manipulation of the behavior and role of the authority figures.

One of the valid concerns about generalizability from such contexts is that groups that are constructed to test a theory are understandably more likely to seem to support that theory than groups which are not deliberately constructed for that purpose. Thus, it is not surprising that certain behaviors occur. This does not mean that the research findings are wrong or misguided or not meaningful; but, it does mean that the groups and interaction contexts of experimental research such as Milgram’s and Zimbardo’s, and the contrived group situations of Psych 601 and Tavistock self-study groups, are not “real life.” All of these conditions represent a sort of laboratory – and one cannot say definitively that “real life” is like this kind of laboratory.

Since the time of the Milgram and Zimbardo studies, many (including the original researchers themselves) have asserted that the findings are indeed applicable to naturally-occurring social settings. Arthur G. Miller (1995), for example, writes:

Concerning the “nonrepresentativeness” of the obedience paradigm, Mook (1983) has offered a particularly instructive comment. He acknowledges that the absence of the experimenter’s power to punish the subject for

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17 The Milgram and Zimbardo studies do not explicitly or deliberately create “groups,” but they do create and establish the contextual conditions for a framework of social interaction.

18 On occasions, the Psych 601 Consultants or Directors have conducted research about group dynamics issues during the course’s 30-year history at the university. In those cases, the students are informed at the outset that research is taking place. In addition, the Psych 601 students are always told that the Observers are advanced students enrolled in Psych 701 writing papers about some aspect of group dynamics.
disobeying orders could threaten, on the surface, the external validity of this paradigm. Yet, that obedience was so high in the baseline experiment, 

*even though subjects could have refused without any objectively apparent risk,* “only adds to the drama of what he saw” (p. 386). From this perspective, a *difference* between the research setting and the natural target setting (e.g., military) can serve to strengthen, not weaken, the case for ecological validity (Emphasis in original. Miller, 1995: 35-36).

Similarly, Wright and Wright (1999) contend that “one can infer from Milgram’s findings that many Americans would be willing to blindly obey authority, even when their actions would lead to potentially painful and harmful consequences for others” (1999: 1108). And Blass (2000) cites Hamilton’s (1992) work, writing:

*I believe ... that Milgram’s work has a value beyond that accorded it in Mixon’s account. True, perhaps Milgram’s subjects suspended their doubts and disbeliefs in going along with experimental commands. Perhaps they did not really believe that damage and death could or should ensure from their actions. So what; they still did them. I see the actions of Milgram’s subjects as more closely analogous to those of corporate employees who produce unsafe products and believe that the company could not really be endangering consumers just to make a profit, than to the actions of a military subordinate ordered to shoot civilians. The fact remains that these employees – or Milgram’s subjects – perform the deeds they are asked to perform (Blass, 2000: 46-47).*

Thus, there are voices that still argue that the findings from the Milgram studies have clear and powerful applicability for aspects of life far removed from a university psychology lab.

Similarly, some assert that the “Stanford Prison Experiment” has equally powerful lessons about social interaction outside the realm of a simulated prison setting. While Zimbardo’s famous, aborted experiment came under a great deal of fire due to ethical considerations, the original researchers and others continue to publish articles based on the experience and outlining the applicability of the research findings to “real world” conditions (cf., Carr, 1995; Lovibond et al., 1979; Maslach, 2000; Zimbardo,
1992; Zimbardo, Maslach, & Haney, 2000). Zimbardo and his colleagues (2000) write, for example, that “the value of the Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE) resides in demonstrating the evil that good people can be readily induced into doing to other good people within the context of socially approved roles, rules, and norms, a legitimizing ideology, and institutional support that transcends individual agency” (2000: 194). They have identified the “Ten Lessons Learned From the SPE,” (Zimbardo et al, 2000) giving voice to their assertions about the generalizability of the experiment to a wide range of social situations and interaction.

Lending support to these claims of generalizability from specific experimental circumstances, some theorists and researchers endorse, in general, the notion of the applicability of experimental, laboratory conditions to real world situations (e.g., Locke, 1986). Wofford (1999), for example, asserts that in a range of studies, “conclusions that would be drawn from the laboratory experiments were not different from those based on field studies. In the absence of other compelling evidence, one might expect the same parallels in [other] well designed and executed lab experimentation” (1999: 527). Ilgen (1986), too, has written that “time and again, results of research conducted in the laboratory were found to generalize to field settings” (1986: 257).

Despite these assertions about the generalizability of the Milgram and Zimbardo social psychology experiments, the research has been strongly criticized for attempting to “reach” too broadly in their claims of generalizability (cf., Bauman, 1989; McGuire, 1997; Miller, 1986; Orne & Holland, 1968; Pynchon & Borum, 1999).19 Helm and

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19 Researchers studying the possible linkages between pornography and violence (e.g., Malamuth & Donnerstein, 1984; Zillmann & Bryant, 1989) have also been criticized for the same kind of “over-reaching,” or an unwillingness on the part of the investigators to acknowledge and discuss candidly some of the significant limitations of their research so that others could learn and benefit from their experience and insight (cf., Gross, 1991).
Morelli (1985), for example, write that there are “problems connected with generalizing Milgram’s experimental findings beyond the confines of the laboratory to the larger world of authority relations and with his characterizations of the dynamics of the ‘authority’ relation in the laboratory setting” (1985: 610-611). The authors critique Milgram’s notion of the subjects’ perception of the roles of both the researcher and the confederate “learner” and write:

Milgram’s experimenter is seen by the subjects as an authority in a respected field, the science of psychology, conducting respectable research with the apparent, benevolent aim of increasing our understanding of learning. Given this, Milgram’s characterization of his subjects’ behaviour as obeying malevolent authority is misleading and incomplete since the subjects operated on the assumption that the experimenter was a bona fide scientist carrying out beneficial research. This same type of assumption was probably at work in the case of Milgram’s ‘confederates’ who continued to participate in the experiment even after it became apparent that the naïve subjects in the experiment were experiencing genuine distress and anxiety (Italics in original. 1985: 617-618).

And, discussing the overall importance of external validity in research, Lynch (1999) has written:

Lab studies do not represent the environment due to the control available to the researcher that is unavailable in the real world, the fact that experimental choices have no short- or long-term consequences for the subjects, the possible existence of demand effects, and the fact that experiments, unlike the real world, have a sudden beginning and a sudden end (1999: 351-352).

In other words, researchers have argued, there are significant differences between the experimental conditions and the “real world,” including the fact that the researcher is able to manipulate “variables” in a way likely to be difficult or impossible in naturally-occurring interaction, the fact that experimental subjects are likely to perceive that their actions do not have meaningful impact on what will happen to them in the coming hours,
days, months, or years, and the fact that contrived, experimental conditions have clear, identifiable starting and ending points.

Many of the criticisms aimed at the social psychology experiments in laboratories can apply to the notion of generalizing from Psych 601 as well. The situation is indeed contrived and under the control of the Director and the Consultants – and the sessions begin and end subject to the schedule determined by those in authority. However, Psych 601 is not an experiment and the students are not experimental subjects; they receive grades based on their written papers derived from their experience in the small groups, and grades can certainly have both academic and professional consequences. Thus, it may be possible to view Psych 601 as a sort of hybrid – retaining some of the characteristics of a social psychology experiment and some of the characteristics of a more conventional graduate seminar at a university. This seeming hybrid status does not, however, make Psych 601 more easily generalizable to other, naturally-occurring groups.

*Generalizing From Qualitative Research*

Acknowledging the difficulties inherent in attempting to generalize from the context of the Psych 601 groups to naturally-occurring real world situations, it is also important to take a moment to discuss the connection between qualitative research and notions of generalizability. Most qualitative researchers recognize at the outset that “generalizability is clearly not the strength of qualitative research” (Firestone, 1993: 16). Instead, qualitative research strategies provide other ways to illuminate social and interactional processes. Miles and Huberman (1994), for example, write that “the most useful generalizations from qualitative studies are analytic, not ‘sample-to-population’” (1994: 28). In other words, the findings of qualitative studies can be used to generalize to theory, and to strengthen theory and theory-building. They are, in short, instructive. And
in the context of this dissertation research, the findings can help shed light on what happens when groups attack their own members. By using a qualitative approach and attempting to depict the conduct in the group, a picture begins to emerge about the conditions of social interaction which are likely to facilitate or elicit group attack behaviors. Qualitative research can help reveal the forms and dynamics of the face-to-face interaction of a particular small group setting—presenting to the reader a statement that says "this is what group attack looks like."

An argument put forth in defense of qualitative research is that qualitative studies can persuade through "rich description" (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 41). By providing a clear, compelling, vivid picture of the lives, feelings, and interaction of the participants, the qualitative researcher makes a persuasive argument about theoretical propositions through concrete, tangible, specific examples from the data. For the qualitative researcher, "understanding is a more fundamental concept for qualitative research than validity" (Emphasis in original. Maxwell, 1992: 281). This fundamental distinction transfers the role of determining broader contextual applicability from the investigator to the reader (cf., Firestone, 1993; Maxwell, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994) — and to later field-based qualitative and quantitative research (generating hypotheses for use in subsequent field work). In discussions of how qualitative research can accomplish this task, many writers refer to the impressive works of Erving Goffman. Volpato and Contarello (1999), for example, talk about Goffman's work as, in many ways, a pinnacle of excellence in qualitative research. Using Asylums (1961) as an example, they write:

The originality of Goffman's contribution lies, in particular, in identifying the connections and similarities between institutions which form part of the everyday landscape of civilized societies and those typical of extreme situations, thus pointing out their continuity (1999: 243).
Goffman, then, provides a model for how qualitative writing allows readers to extrapolate from detailed descriptions of specific social interaction and identify similar phenomena in the interpersonal situations with which they are more familiar.

I do not claim to be an Erving Goffman, or that my dissertation research drawing on qualitative research methodologies (discussed in Chapter 3) necessarily allows the reader to make direct connections to their own experiences in small groups. I believe, though, that part of the responsibility inherent in this kind of qualitative research is to attempt to provide that illumination, to act as a form of magnifying glass to look at particular aspects of small group interaction and give readers a clear, vivid picture that may resonate with them or help them think more intently about small group dynamics. Thus, I wish to temper any notion of generalizability from research on Psych 601 with a thoughtful awareness of the strengths particular to qualitative research – and, in all of this, to present a clear and compelling description of the phenomenon of group attack.
All social organization consists therefore in neutralizing the disruptive and
deregulating impact of moral behavior.


In Italy, for 30 years under the Borgias, they had warfare, terror, murder,
bloodshed, but they produced Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and the
Renaissance. In Switzerland, they had brotherly love; they had 500 years
of democracy and peace – and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock.

-Harry Lime, in Carol Reed’s *The Third Man* (1949)

The idea of understanding how humans interact and communicate with one
another in face-to-face settings has motivated intellectual activities and pursuits for
centuries. Some of the earliest recorded philosophical literature speaks of the nature of
groups and of relations between individuals and groups. Fictional writing over time has
addressed these same issues and struggled with the same philosophical and social
concerns – from the writings of Dickens and Austen in England, to Flaubert and Stendhal
in France, Boccaccio in Italy, Mann and Hesse in Germany, and Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and
Chekhov in Russia. These writers and theorists articulated many of the fundamental
assumptions which guide even contemporary research and thinking about groups.
The Flourish and Decline of Research on Small Groups

Almost 100 years ago, French sociologist, Emile Durkheim argued against individualistic notions of freedom and autonomy by pointing to the corpus of moral and social rules extant even before an individual is born. Durkheim (1915) saw these group-made rules as largely controlling the behavior of individuals, duty and voluntary behavior being virtually inextricably linked. Durkheim stressed that concepts and categories are supra-individual — that they are the product of collective activities, and that since individual thinking necessarily utilizes concepts, the idea of individual volition apart from group norms is often an illusory one. Thus, Durkheim articulated a fundamental tenet of social science inquiry — and a particularly powerful force within the social science studies of small groups.

The field of “small group research” could be a template for study that is indeed interdisciplinary. So many diverse realms of academic inquiry have delved into the field that trying to provide some kind of overview is a daunting task at best. And, while the extant social science literature from numerous disciplines is replete with theory and practice about small groups, most of these “exist primarily in conceptual bits and pieces, scattered throughout the various literatures of anthropology, sociology, psychology, and organizational studies” (Kahn, 1995: 491). The task, then, has been to gather representative components of these “scattered bits and pieces” to make sense of how research on small groups has addressed the notion of the place and function of pain, danger, and attack in group life.

The earliest empirical research on small groups parallels the history of the development of the field of social psychology itself, flourishing as sociological research methodologies became more elaborate and prevalent after the horrific experiences of
World War I and as national emergencies and social disruptions spread through the societies of the United States and Europe:

Although its roots go back to the end of the 19th century (e.g., Triplett, 1898), small group research first became a distinguishable field within North American social psychology in the early part of the 20th century. It flourished in that domain through the 1940s and 1950s (Arrow, McGrath, & Berdahl, 2000: 4).

The 1940's, 50's, and 60's represented, for many, the apogee of research into small groups (cf., Cartwright & Zander, 1968; Frey, 1994; Ickes & Knowles, 1982; Mullins, 1973; Steiner, 1974, 1986; Tindale & Anderson, 1998). Tindale and Anderson (1998), for example, write that “during the 1950s and 1960s, small group research remained a dominant force in social psychology” (1998: 1). Lawrence Frey (1994) looked at the intellectual trajectory and its relationship to broader social history, writing that in the middle of the 20th century:

... small group theory and research once flourished; its growth was tied to the perceived importance of groups in society and the belief that research could make a difference in people’s lives. Group discussion was seen, for example, as fundamental and essential for democracy, and group research promised a way of ensuring that democracy would prevail over totalitarianism (1994: 573).

In those decades, the academic literature in the social science disciplines suddenly began to make repeated reference to this newfound interest in groups. Funding for research on small groups was plentiful; new theories and discoveries about group dynamics were expounded and discussed with great fanfare and enthusiasm (Moreland, Hogg, & Hains, 1994). The years 1953-55, in particular, could be seen as a high point for publications in the field: Cartwright & Zander’s Group Dynamics (1953), Hare, Borgatta, and Bales’s Small Groups (1955), and several special issues of journals such as
the American Sociological Review (1954) and Sociometry (1954). For the first time, terms from the field of small group research were incorporated into the classification systems in Psychological Abstracts: “sociometry” in 1940, “group dynamics” in 1945, and “small groups” in 1950 (Ickes & Knowles, 1982).

By the late 1960’s, however, the field seemed to run out of steam, causing some researchers to refer to “the crisis” in social psychology (Witte, 1996). Meanwhile, the prominence, quantity, and innovation of investigation seemed to diminish as the decade drew to a close – and “groups research began to wane” (Tindale & Anderson, 1998: 2). Mullins (1973) characterized the development of small group theory as the “light that flared” in the 1940s and 1950s and then faded rapidly in the 1960s. Arrow and her colleagues dramatically described the phenomenon by saying that “group research suffered a system crash” (Arrow, McGrath, & Berdahl, 2000: 11).

Over the past 25 years, there have been a number of publications that have eulogized the death of small group research; even a review of the titles alone of articles reads like a moribund catalogue of investigative despondency (with occasional glimmers of optimism):

“Whatever happened to the group in social psychology?” (Steiner, 1974).
“The decline and fall of the small group.” (Goodstein & Dovico, 1979).
“Towards a more social social psychology.” (Taylor & Brown, 1979).
“What happened to the touted revival of the group?” (Steiner, 1983).
“Back to the future: Social psychological research on groups.” (Moreland, Hogg, & Hains, 1994).
“You can go home again: Returning group research to the group context with an eye on developmental issues” (Worchel, 1994).
“Small group research and the crisis of social psychology” (Witte, 1996).
“Small group research, that once and future field” (McGrath, 1997).
"Group research trends in social and organizational psychology: Whatever happened to intragroup research?" (Sanna & Parks, 1997).

In all of the articles above, social psychologists and other researchers bemoan the demise of small group research, speculating about causes and manifestations, but essentially all agree that the research seemed to plateau and then begin its inexorable downhill slide. Moreland, Hogg, and Hains (1994), for example, argue that contemporary research on small groups has focused principally on social cognition and that there does not seem to be any kind of re-emergence of interest in groups. Worchel (1994) also decries the lack of group research, pointing out that most research on group behavior "has been conducted outside the group setting and devoid of social interaction" (1994: 205). Sanna and Parks (1997) describe how most so-called group research is actually about intergroup relations, with minimal attention to behavior within groups – arguing that it is a "mistake for social psychologists to neglect the study of groups" (1997: 266). And other researchers have reached similar conclusions – without the use of evocative titles or calls to action. Numerous studies over the years examined researchers' opinions, publication patterns, or journalistic trends as they pertain to small group research (e.g., Bettenhausen, 1991; Fisch & Daniel, 1982; Fiske & Goodwin, 1994; Goodman, Ravlin, & Argote, 1986; Levine & Moreland, 1990; Lewicki, 1982; Manstead, 1990; Moreland, 1996; Pleban & Richardson, 1979; Reis & Stiller, 1992; Rushton & Roediger, 1978; West, Newson, & Penaughty, 1992) – and virtually all identified the manifestations of the decline of social psychology research in small groups. Thus, Witte was recently forced to conclude that "the crisis still exists in the sense that small groups have not been the center of social psychology for a long time" (1996: 1).

In his influential and oft-cited article in the 1974 issue of the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, Steiner somewhat plaintively asked "Whatever
Happened to the Group in Social Psychology?" Steiner described why he believed that psychologists seemed to have lost interest in research on small groups. He believed that societal conditions affect researchers' decisions about topics or focus areas—and that periods of minimal social conflict lead researchers away from group-level analysis and toward "an individualistic approach to behavior" (Emphasis added. Moreland, Hogg, & Hains, 1994: 528). Despite his lamenting query, however, Steiner optimistically prophesied a rosy scenario for the future of research in group dynamics, contending that the intellectual climate of the time (the late 1970s) was favorable for a resurgence of interest in this important but neglected topic as researchers responded to times of increasing social strife with increased emphasis on the study of small groups.

By 1986, however, Steiner had concluded despondently that his analysis had been flawed—or inordinately optimistic at best. Looking back, he contended that social psychology may simply be inextricably linked to theories and research methods unfavorable to the study of small groups. And few researchers since have even attempted to argue with Steiner's conclusion.

Where Did Small Group Research Go?

Steiner and subsequently others have argued that the demise of small group research may be, in part, attributable to overall social changes. But, more importantly

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20 As an example, Steiner (1974) contrasts the turmoil during the great depression and during and immediately after World War II with the relatively “tranquil interlude” (1974: 105) of the Eisenhower years.

21 Steiner (1974) believed that interest in group research is stimulated by significant levels of societal conflict in the eight to ten years before the research (sort of a decade-long “lag time”). Thus, the popularity of small group research in the 1950s was, in his view, directly attributable to the social upheavals related to World War II. As social conflict diminished, he argued, then there would be a concomitant decrease in small group research a decade later. Steiner had believed, however, that the social upheaval in the U.S. during the late 1960s and early 1970s would lead to a resurgence in research interest. By 1983, however, he could not detect any significant re-emergence of the importance of small group research (Moreland, Hogg, and Hains, 1994).
they contend, a shift in methodological approaches has been a major factor in the overall decline of small group research within the field. The primary observation has been that research that purports to be “group” research has often focused instead on individuals rather than on anything particularly “group-like.” Research of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, of course, looked at the behavior of individuals – in the context of a larger group dynamic. The studies:

... viewed social behavior as a continuing process, one that changed and developed over time as a result of the social context in which it appeared. The focus of this research was on the group rather than on isolated behaviors. When the investigators described behaviors, they placed these behaviors in the context of the group. Groups were presented as dynamic units, often changing, and in order to capture the group, one had to take this change into account. The group was a system, and individual activities were interrelated properties of the group (Worchel, 1994: 206).

In the past 25 years, however, the research took a very notable turn: individual behaviors being investigated were typically divorced from any group or social context. Fiske and Taylor (1991), for example, write that missing from much of the individualistically-focused research are “other people in a status other than that of stimulus. Other people are not simply targets: they reinforce, disagree, initiate, and otherwise actively inform the perceiver” (1991: 556). Rather than looking at individuals as part of a social interaction or group dynamic, researchers instead focused on internal, individual-level variables (e.g., social cognition, individual opinion formation, internal heuristic models). The individual behaviors studied are seen as the outcomes or endpoints rather than as aspects of the larger interactional process (Worchel, 1994). And this shift toward the study of the individual rather than the group level of interaction prompted Nye to point out that the “research has been criticized for not being social
enough” (1994: 317). In his review of group research, Bettenhausen (1991) points out that in response to this on-going critique, researchers have asked:

... groups scholars to augment the field’s dominant concern with internal processes with [a] perspective [that] adopts the group as the level of analysis, explains group behavior by examining its social context, and holds that the group has an existence and purpose apart from serving as a setting for social interaction and apart from the individuals who compose it (1991: 388).

Despite the call for greater emphasis on group-level analysis, the individualistic trends in research continued. It is as if researchers stopped heeding Durkheim’s warning that “if, then, we begin with the individual we shall be able to understand nothing of what takes place in the group” (1938: 104).

The pattern that was emerging was that researchers began to ask more and more questions about the specific individuals within the group and their individual attributes – and the research designs reflected these questions. Or, was it the reverse? Did the shift in questions come about because of a shift in the overall research methodology?

Steiner’s pessimistic rejoinder (1986) to his earlier plaintive query found that research tended to focus on the individual rather than the group as the unit of analysis. Researchers would focus on a single behavior of a single individual rather than looking at the sequence of behaviors in the overall group. Thus, any extant claim to a “resurgence” of interest in small group research is “misleading, because it involves research that is not about groups at all. ... Few attempts are made to study actual social behavior, and many of the ‘groups’ that are studied are minimal in nature.” (Moreland, Hogg, & Hains, 1994: 548-549).

Some, like Tindale and Anderson (1998), argue that “the trend in the field toward more controlled, laboratory-based research addressing cognitive issues, such as cognitive
Chapter 2

dissonance and causal attribution, led to group-level questions being addressed by individual-level research designs” (1998: 2). They go on to say that in order to achieve the highest methodological rigor and “in order to control or hold constant as many factors as possible, researchers began addressing these questions with ‘fake’ groups (i.e., individuals in rooms supposedly interacting with other group members)” (Emphasis added. 1998: 2). Fiske and Goodwin (1994) reached similar conclusions in talking about the nexus of social cognition research and small group research, evocatively stating that “our subjects sit alone in the lab, like Tolman’s rats in the maze, lost in thought.” The research was, they declared, “insufficiently social” (1994: 152).

Kraus, too, contended that “the individual has been overemphasized as the causal determinant ... at the cost of underestimating the power of social forces” (1997: 129). He indicted the researchers and their methodologies by stating that another “self-limiting aspect of research on the group psychology ... has stemmed from the domination of research models that use the individual as the primary investigative unit of analysis” (1997: 132). Citing Steiner’s initial outcry, Kraus examines both the motives and outcomes of researcher choices:

Motivated, perhaps foremost, by a need for greater experimental control, an individual analysis ... offers researchers the relative ease and quickness in producing experimental results (Steiner,1974). Aside from issues of research design, though, I believe the overemphasis in examining individual causes ... at the price of underinvestigating group-level variables also reflects an inclination on the part of research psychologists, as well as their experimental subjects, to underestimate the role of systemic group-level factors in shaping individual behavior. (1997: 135).

22 Mullen and Goethals (1987) describe numerous instances of contemporary research on small groups where one will rarely encounter an actual group of participants. Typically, subjects are studied individually; a group may wait in another room or possibly only exist in theory or on paper.

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Indeed, Worchel, also, argues that group researchers have essentially lost all connection to the notion of "group" in their research. They may say that they are studying small groups, but they are simply studying some behaviors that take place when others are present – a far cry from any notion of "group dynamics":

Behaviors that occur within groups are extracted from the group context and subjected to microscopic examination. These behaviors are described as "effects," end-points in the causal chain. The concern, in many cases, is on the cognitive processes involved, rather than on social interaction or group dynamics....

Perhaps the crudest blow of all has been unintentionally dealt by work on social identity and social categorization that has aptly named its paradigm the "minimal group paradigm" (Haslam & Turner, 1992; Tajfel & Turner, 1996). The "group" in this research exists only as a category or as an assignment to a noninteractive grouping of individuals. One can read many accounts of current group research procedures without ever finding an actual group of subjects (see Mullen & Goethals, 1987). Subjects are examined as individuals while the group lurks outside the room, or only in the minds of the subjects.

While the early approaches could be characterized as inclusive, many current approaches are often reductionistic. Rather than studying the body (the group) and the interaction between members, these approaches focus on specific organs (behavior, effects) and the underlying mechanisms or causes (often cognitive in nature) involved. The methodology is precise, and the results are often illuminating and provocative. But one is left wondering what has been learned about groups. It is easy to understand the basis for Steiner's (1974) question "where has the group gone in group research?" (Worchel, 1994: 207-208).

Rather than examining the group as a whole, researchers have reduced the entire dynamic to piecemeal, component parts.23 By focusing only on the individual pieces of

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23 Worchel (1994) discusses several possible reasons for the shift in methodological approach to group research, including the fact that group-based research is "more difficult and requires greater resources (time and subjects)" along with the fact that "the methods of study are often less precise and likely to receive a hostile reception at journals whose hallmark is protecting current methodological rigor" (1994: 209). In addition, Worchel speculates that the examination of group-based dynamics can also require researchers to study groups as they go through a "complete cycle from beginning to death (ending)" (1994: 210), thus contributing to the lack of attention to small group research in the contemporary
the interaction, the research seem to have lost sight of the big picture. The studies forsake the holistic framework of the prior decades; thus, "the situation is reminiscent of the story of the blind men describing an elephant. Each grabs a part of the beast and paints a vivid picture of that part. But the descriptions of the parts never yield a portrait of the whole (the elephant)" (Worchel, 1994: 208).

Did the small group researchers change the nature of the kinds of questions they asked — or did the changes in methodology lead to the shift in the nature of the questions? Frey contends that it is the latter, and argues that the reasons why group research has waned and the concomitant failure to attract researchers to the field:

... may be due to the philosophical assumptions and methodological practices that have come to dominate small group research. There is a reflexive relationship between the conceptual and operational levels of research; theory guides method, but method also directs theory. Although we might like to think that one always fits the method to the question, the questions we view as important invariably are influenced by the methods we consider acceptable. (Emphasis added. Frey, 1994: 552).

Researchers have, he argues, "traded real-world significance for perceived methodological rigor — a false dichotomy if ever one existed. The result is research that often is internally sound, but empty of life. Is it little wonder, then, that interest in group research has decreased significantly? Small groups are no less important today than they have been at any other time in history; it is the research that is less relevant. If group research is to recapture its place at the forefront of research, it needs a substantial shot in the arm." (Frey, 1994: 573). Whether driven by changes in intellectual focus or shifts in preferred methodology, most of the contemporary social psychology research is rarely
about small groups; thus, the research may lack the interactional importance and the potency or relevance for addressing social issues that it once had.

**Small Group Research Migrates – and Morphs**

If small group research is no longer a significant force within social psychology, does this mean that no one is conducting research into group-related dynamics and interaction? No, research into groups has continued – but primarily *outside* the field of social psychology. Instead, “the torch has been passed to (or, more accurately, picked up by) colleagues in other disciplines,” most notably researchers in organizational behavior and organizational psychology (Levine & Moreland, 1990: 620). Numerous aspects of group functioning are now incorporated into organizational research – although the focus, methodologies, and suppositions of the research are quite different from those of the groundbreaking social psychology research. In his overview of the field, Mitchell found that the four most frequently researched areas in organizational behavior were “personality, job attitudes, motivation, and leadership” (1979: 244). Cummings (1982) assessment of the field a few years later focused on the same basic areas. Subsequent reviews of the field (e.g., O’Reilly, 1990) have found a very similar kind of job-related, utilitarian emphasis in the vast majority of the research.

The field of Organizational Behavior (OB) has contributed to an understanding of group processes; indeed, the field has changed considerably – a change concomitant with the decline of small group research in social psychology. For example, there were no M.B.A., management, or business degree programs that required an OB course in 1960. By 1970, however, every major program required OB as a part of its core curriculum (Dent, 1993). As group research in social psychology waned, organizational issues entered the spotlight within the behavioral sciences (Roethlisberger, 1977).
Much of the contemporary OB theory and research, however, is quite removed from the questions of prior small group researchers; current studies address nuts-and-bolts issues such as performance, decision-making, or problem-solving (cf., Bazerman, 1990; Burnstein & Berbaum, 1983; Cohen, March, & Olson, 1972; Hirokawa & Johnston, 1989; Irving, 1982; Jarboe & Wittemann, 1996; Moreland & Myaskovsky, 2000). While these issues may be important components within group dynamics, in much of the contemporary OB research they are often viewed as ends in themselves or the ultimate rationale for group existence (Frey, 1996). Even now, an examination of OB research into small groups reveals a similar and pragmatic stress on the functional aspects of group life – as if the only purpose in studying small groups was to perfect the completion of the mundane, daily tasks of organizational existence. Thus, we can see that the “emphasis on basic social psychological research on groups has been replaced by an applications-oriented approach” (Tindale & Anderson, 1998: 3). Fiske and Goodwin, for example, looked at the nexus between small group studies and other strands of research and concluded that “much of the ... research has been conducted in the service of understanding and improving productivity and satisfaction within groups” (1994: 165). As they identified, a great deal of the OB literature has focused on group “performance.”

This extensive body of group-related research within OB has concentrated on determining causes or determinants of effective or impeded group performance. The apparent “goal” of this kind of research is to help groups improve overall performance. The studies argue that groups (or “teams,” the term preferred by some within the field) can be “very effective units of the work organization and that teams can fail to provide high performance effectiveness, depending on the features that they incorporate and the
contextual conditions under which they operate" (Arrow, McGrath, & Berdahl, 2000: 21). Tschan (1995), Guzzo and Dickson (1996), Cohen and Bailey (1997), and Shaw and Barrett-Power (1998), among others, have conducted elaborate research and cite numerous other organizational behavior and organizational psychology studies focusing particularly on this issue of examining, improving, or enhancing group task performance.

Some researchers might dispute the conclusion that small group research has been focused primarily on issues pertaining to performance. This is not because they believe that OB research is looking at broader, interactional issues in small group research. Instead, they mount arguments simply to demonstrate that the research has focused, rather, on other nuts-and-bolts issues pertaining to organizational group functioning. Frey, for example, asserts that "small group research has focused almost exclusively on group decision making, ... as if this were the only thing that groups do" (1994: 557). Other contemporary researchers in the field look at specific particular "functions" of groups such as: information processing (e.g., Hinsz, Tindale, & Vollrath, 1997; Wittenbaum & Stasser, 1996), cohesion (e.g., Carron & Brawley, 2000; Evans & Dion, 1991; Widmeyer, Carron, & Brawley, 1993), group task structure (e.g., Tschan & Von Cranach, 1996), decision-making (e.g., Farmer & Roth, 1998; Street, 1997), leadership (e.g., Worchel, Jenner, & Hebl, 1998), and task management (e.g., Waller, 1997). And, while some researchers may debate which are the most prominent topics in contemporary small group research (Is it performance? Is it cohesion? Is it decision-making? Is it information management?), virtually all would concur that the focus has decidedly retreated from the more group-oriented issues historically addressed within the social sciences – leading Frey (1994) to lament that "even such long-time recognized variables as norms, roles, and conformity, variables that have faded from group research agendas,
need to be reconsidered” (1994: 557). Thus, under the auspices of Organizational Behavior, the field has shifted from broader theoretical (or even philosophical) concerns to the more pragmatic aspects of group interaction in organizational and work-site contexts.

Research on Conflict and Aggression

Meanwhile, outside of OB, other researchers have in some ways touched on notions of pain, danger, and attack in their studies and writings. There is a great deal of literature on human violence and aggression, with numerous theories and ideas expounded over the years – and, indeed, over the centuries. Many now-classic studies (e.g., Berkowitz, 1962, 1989; Brown, 1986; Dollard, et al, 1939; Lorenz, 1966; Sherif, et al., 1961; Zillman, 1979) have described multiple facets of the role and psychology of violence and aggression in human society. In the context of this dissertation, however, I look particularly at the research on violence and aggression as it pertains to organized group life to determine any intellectual linkage or lineage with the subject matter of this study.

Within the social psychology work from the heyday of small group research, some studies have given voice to notions of attack or conflict in their analysis – outlining theories or frameworks that stress the important function of attack and conflict behaviors within the group dynamic. Tuckman & Jensen (1977), for example, referred to “storming.” Schutz (1966) talked about struggles for “control.” Bales (1950) addressed central issues of “antagonism.” Bennis and Shepard (1956) gave voice to the notion of

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24 Some, such as Wyatt (1993) have extended the criticism and argued that political or ideological positions are the determinants of contemporary research methodologies. For example, she says, giving prominence to “task groups” instead of other types of small groups is rooted in male-dominated notions of what is socially meaningful and reflects the conventional division between the so-called “productive” life or organization and work versus the “reproductive” life of home and social interaction.
“counterdependence.” And Bion (1961) talked extensively about “fight/flight” dynamics within small groups.\textsuperscript{25} As the field of social psychology shifted away from small group research, however, the “messy” issues pertaining to intragroup conflict and struggle seemed to disappear from the research. For the earlier small group researchers, Kraus writes, “the criticality of aggression and conflict in the growth of a group [was] undisputed” (1997: 122). The consensus about this criticality was not sustained within the field, however, and “comprehensive theories of how aggression in the small group arises, how groups work through their aggression, and why many groups get stuck in unhealthy ways of dealing with issues of aggression have not been prevalent” in contemporary small group research (Kraus, 1997: 123). Thus, with the overall decline of social psychology interest in small groups was a concurrent decline in the focus on topics related to attack, conflict, or aggression in group life.

Within the fields of organizational behavior and organizational psychology there has been more current research pertaining to attack and conflict. The work has not, however, been very pivotal within the field – instead falling between the proverbial cracks between disciplines and, as such, rarely addressed comprehensively or extensively. Farmer and Roth (1998) rather despondently assert that “unfortunately, research on conflict management in work groups seems to fall into the empty spaces between dominant paradigms” (1998: 670) – and thus does not seem to be a prominent topic on the academic radar screens of researchers from within any particular discipline.

This does not mean there is no research on conflict within OB. However, it does mean that the current OB research on conflict in groups is not a dominant “strain” within

\textsuperscript{25} The group development ideas of researchers such as Bennis and Shepard (1956) and Bion (1961) are discussed extensively below.
the field. Instead, when it does occur, the OB research has utilized the same
individualistic paradigm used by other areas of contemporary group research: rather than
looking at conflict as a group process, research on “conflict-handling modes has tended
to focus almost exclusively on situations between individuals” (Farmer & Roth, 1998:
674). Additionally, OB research has not been able to rid itself of the essentially
pragmatic, bottom-line approach to research (i.e., an overwhelming emphasis on
outcomes over process); thus, studies about the conflicts taking place as part of the group
process are usually about the ways to help the group carry out particular assignments or
tasks (Jehn, 1997). “Research on organizational conflict interactions,” say Gayle and
Preiss (1998), “usually has focused on the nature and implementation of conflict
management styles or strategies” (1998: 282) in order to achieve some ultimate goal-
driven group outcome. As Arrow, Berdahl, and McGrath (2000) put it, “recent [OB]
work treats groups as systems for managing conflict and generating consensus” on their
path to achieving particular group goals. (Emphasis in original. 2000: 20). In other
words, conflict has been an issue for group researchers, but typically in the service of
some other more nuts-and-bolts goals and not to examine its role in overall group
dynamics.

Even when the OB research on small groups is about the conflict itself,
contemporary investigators seem to focus on a fairly narrow facet of conflict and its
relationship to group life. For example, like Arrow and her colleagues (2000), some
researchers have noted the trend to study tactics for managing conflict rather than
examining the nature and process of intragroup conflict itself (e.g., Drory & Ritov, 1997;
Gayle & Preiss, 1998; Jarboe & Wittemann, 1996; van de Vliert, Euwema, & Huismans,
1995). Others have looked at cross-cultural issues in conflict management, viewing

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conflict merely as manifestations of cultural difference or collision (e.g., Elsayed-Ekhoul & Buda, 1996; Gabriellidis, et al, 1997). Kozan (1997), for example, echoes the idea that research has addressed individual components, and points out that extant conflict-related research has focused “on a single aspect of conflict management such as negotiation (Schuster & Copeland, 1996) or third-party roles (Donohue & Bresnahan, 1994; Elangovan, 1995)” (1997: 341). In addition, other research follows the familiar pattern of numerous OB studies by examining the relationship between conflict and productivity or performance (e.g., Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Nicotera, 1993). In other words, OB research on conflict does not seem to address the nature or group process of the conflict itself; instead, it examines conflict merely as a cog in the machine of pragmatic, institutional outcomes.

There is one way, however, in which research on conflict and groups has been rather prominent: intergroup conflict. Numerous researchers over the years, from a variety of disciplines, have examined the causes, nature, manifestations, and consequences of conflict between groups. From the earliest small group studies, through Sherif’s (1961) classic Robber’s Cave experiment, up through contemporary applications (e.g., Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Rabbie, & Lodewijkx, 1996; Van Knippenberg, & Ellemers, 1993), practitioners have placed great emphasis on studying intergroup rather than intragroup conflict and struggles. Researchers studying dynamics within a group, then, have rarely focused on conflict at all; those studying the interaction between groups, however, have rarely focused on anything else. Smith and Berg (1987), for example, are emphatic in declaring that “although there is minimal discussion of conflict in the literature on internal group processes, in the literature on relations among groups, there is little discussion of anything other than conflict (Emphasis in original. 1987: 153).
Bettenhausen (1991) concurs with Smith & Berg’s appraisal, and writes that “most conflict research focuses on individual or intergroup levels” (1991: 365). Farmer and Roth (1998) also echo the point, asserting that:

... the subfield of organizational behavior dedicated to studying conflict management has advanced quickly (Kozan, 1997), but Brown (1992) concluded that it has generally focused on managing conflicts between individuals (e.g., interpersonal bargaining) and between groups (e.g., labor negotiations)” (1998: 670).

Thus, while organizational behavior and organizational psychology theorists have addressed some of the nuts-and-bolts, individualistic aspects of attack and conflict in groups, contemporary social psychology researchers have concentrated primarily on conflict between groups – leaving the notion of *intragroup* conflict to fall between the cracks.

Meanwhile, the notions of attack, pain, and danger have received some social science attention outside the confines of small group research (Almvik, Woods, & Rasmussen, 2000). This research, however, has typically focused on physical violence – often in workplace settings. The research does not attempt to be any kind of analysis of violence or a study of its function in group life; instead, it has usually culminated primarily in prescriptions for preventing or reducing the risk of interpersonal violence.

In the past decade alone, much has been written about the subject of conflict, violence, and aggression in organizations (e.g., Driscoll, Worthington, and Hurrell, 1995; General Accounting Office, 1994; Johnson and Indvik, 1994; National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 1996; Nigro and Waugh, 1996; O’Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Glew, 1966; Resnick and Kausch, 1995; Mossman, 1995). While the studies vary in substantive complexity, rigor, and insight into the problem, virtually all agree that
violence and aggression in the workplace is a serious issue (O’Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Glew, 1996). Some go on to suggest that employee-on-employee aggression may indeed be the result of supervisory or institutional practices and organizational culture (General Accounting Office, 1994). Nigro and Waugh, for example, conclude that management must “implement personnel policies and management processes that improve the organization’s ability to identify and neutralize potentially violent employees, customers, and clients “ (1996: 330). Their focus, however, is on “strategies designed to prevent robberies, politically motivated terrorism, or other violent intrusions by outsiders,” which, they determine, “may offer little or no protection against employee-on-employee assaults” (1996: 331). Indeed, much of the literature in this area concentrates on the need for heightened security and additional training to better cope with “disgruntled” employees and angry customers. While this may be of invaluable assistance for workplace managers, the research does little to illuminate the process or manifestations of conflict within groups.

According to the U.S. government’s National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), homicide and other workplace violence is the second leading cause of death in the workplace. The 1996 NIOSH study reported that there were 1,063 work-related homicides in 1993 – 35 percent more than the annual rate during the 1980s and a six percent increase from 1992. And these figures represent only the homicides. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the federal government does not maintain records of aggressive behavior or violent attacks in the workplace (personal communication, 2000). The phenomenon of intra-organizational attack and violence achieved its own name – “going postal” in the pop culture terminology of the 1990s – in
response to several high-profile attacks on U.S. postal service employees by co-workers within U.S.P.S. facilities (General Accounting Office, 1994).

When looking beyond the statistics covered in most studies of workplace conflict and violence, most reports include minimal if any analysis of the interaction between organizational or group life and the causes or manifestations of aggression and hostility between members. In the limited instances when the research has incorporated analyses of motivations for attack and violence, it has rarely ventured beyond a very one-dimensional framework for understanding employee actions. Folger and Baron (1996), for example, argue that employees who describe themselves as powerless and perceive multiple injustices over time will resort to aggressive and possibly physically violent behavior. Thus, they contend, these individual acts of violence and aggression emanate from workers who feel unfairly treated and rejected by management. While this may be an accurate contention and help pathologize particular individuals and their responses (c.f., Gilligan, 1996; VandenBos and Bulatao, et. al., 1996), it does little to explain why some organizations have disgruntled but non-violent employees while others have worksites that erupt into violence. Nor, more importantly from the perspective of the present research, does it in any way contribute significantly to our understanding of the role or function of attack-related behavior in group life.
Drives and Needs as Determinants of Group Life

What does evolution tell us?

While social psychology, organizational behavior, and psychoanalytic theory (below) have been the dominant paradigms26 for understanding group interaction, they are not alone among intellectual disciplines in their pursuit of an improved understanding of the topic. There are those theorists who posit a more "evolutionary" analysis; in Strategic Interaction, for example, Erving Goffman (1969) compares the human being engaging in social interaction to an animal sensing its environment. The animal's instincts aid, among other things, in its ability to protect itself from dangerous predators. This perspective, a seeming combination of evolutionary biology and cognitive psychology, is known as evolutionary psychology (Evans & Zarate, 2000) — a shorthand for "understanding the human mind/brain mechanisms in evolutionary perspective" (Buss, 1999: 3).

In the view of evolutionary psychologists, the human mind is in reality a collection of information-processing devices designed by natural selection to untangle adaptive quandaries like those originally faced by humanity's hunter-gatherer ancestors (Barkow, Cosmides, & Tooby, 1992). Or, as Nicholson (1997) argues, "our minds and bodies are adapted for an ancestral environment" while used in contemporary, everyday social situations (1993: 1055). Evolutionary theorists argue that human beings are "programmed" to avoid pain and danger (Tooby & Cosmides, 1990). As such, this evolutionary need to increase chances for survival will have significant impact on the ways in which people interact. And recently, Astrid Schutz's (1999) research looked

26 I am using the notion of "paradigms" here in the particular sense used by Kuhn (1962) to refer to an integrated set of theoretical presuppositions that lead the researcher to see the world of one's research interest in a particular way.
explicitly at the taxonomy of four self-presentation strategies (assertive, offensive, protective, and defensive) — all of which are rooted in the axiomatic desire for protection from harm. From the perspective of this research, group processes are fundamentally about self-preservation.

Other researchers have examined a more explicit link between pain and danger and group norms, particularly hypothesizing that they can lead to the creation or enforcement of social norms and behavioral conformity. Argyris (1968), for example, articulates that there is a “survival orientation” concerned with self-protection and using a range of defense mechanisms, as distinct from the “competence orientation” demonstrating a receptive and flexible mien within the human psyche; these orientations, then, form the basis of much social interaction. And, in recent group-based research on social cognition and interactional decision-making processes, a colleague and I argued that the cognitive process of all individuals in interpersonal contexts “is an essential element of maintaining safety in a world in which, at any given moment, there may well be others present with potential power to harm the social perceiver” (Ostfield & Jehn, 1999: 180).

The danger of being harmed by others, then, becomes a central feature of the evolutionary psychology perspective on the development of group norms. Researchers such as Opp (1989), for example, submit that social norms are perceived and explicitly taught through a variety of means, including using the lessons of the negative (i.e., painful) experiences of one member (or subgroup) to help members see, in an evolutionary fashion, the wisdom of adopting particular norms (i.e., “If you don’t behave, this could happen to you.”). Punishment, in which third parties coerce rule-breakers...
(including those who fail to help coerce transgressors), is therefore a very potent mechanism to maintain (presumptively) established norms (Boyd & Richerson, 1992).

From the evolutionary psychology perspective, there are two basic impacts humans can have on each other: helping or hurting, bestowing benefits or inflicting costs. Thus, the two major categories of social conditionals are seen to be social exchange and threat – conditional helping and conditional hurting – carried out by individuals or groups on individuals or groups (Barkow, Cosmides, & Tooby, 1992).

At its most basic level, interpersonal skills assist humans in identifying situations that may pose some kind of danger. In this way, people work to preserve their safety (Ostfield & Jehn, 1999). Evolutionary approaches suggest that people quickly, if not automatically, process information about others and situations relevant to survival. In particular, individuals take note of the degree of dominance and threat posed by another in order to maintain their own survival – and, some might say, autonomy (Kenrick, 1989).

Given this evolutionary perspective on social interaction, it is fair to maintain that interpersonal abilities developed because humans need some way of making sense of the world, of predicting what kinds of results will follow from what kinds of causes, and of planning what kinds of actions are needed to achieve some desired outcome. It seems only common sense to assert that people engage in group behavior in this way because in some important situations these systems proved to be adaptive; by approaching the world in a certain way, people are able to get along better, to be more effective, to prepare more efficiently for what is to come. Thus, for human beings, these experiences of the social realm are, in a very real sense, very nearly the most important survival tools we have.
From the perspective of evolutionary psychologists, the idea that humans can rapidly make self-protective distinctions derives presumed support from the research of social psychologists. Thus, evolutionary psychologists might argue, the fact that researchers can easily obtain in-group behavior by making use of the symbolic marking of laboratory groups (c.f., Rabbie, 1991) is strong support for the argument in favor of an evolutionary ability to adapt to unfamiliar social environments. Nicholson (1997), for example, contends that:

... experimentally, the primacy of this tendency [to make in-group/out-group distinctions] is demonstrated in minimal cue group identification studies, where mere random labeling of individuals produces in-group/out-group attributions, before even any group process has taken place (Tajfel & Billig, 1974). Moreover, out-group information is stored and organized in terms of attribute categories, while in-group judgments are made via personal and relational data (Ostrom et al., 1991). (Nicholson, 1997: 1068).

An evolutionary perspective, then, posits that these critical conceptual systems are developed and put into constant use in group situations. They are vital for survival. Those with less power\(^{27}\) in any situation need to pay greater attention to those with power to understand and interpret the actions of those who have the power to hurt them in some way (Baker-Miller, 1976; Smith, 1982). Safety can mean more than just eliminating the threat of physical harm; we can elaborate on an evolutionary approach to see how safety can come to mean maintaining a relatively high level of interactional skill and minimizing the chances of the pain and danger inherent in social disapproval and rejection.

\(^{27}\) In the context of this analysis, "power" is seen as "any relationship among actors such that the behavior of one or more actors at least partly causes the behavior of one or more other actors" (Frey, 1993: 163).
Theories about human needs

The notion that people are driven by their desire to fulfill a set of universal needs does not strike most of us as surprising. This idea certainly fits with the kinds of evolutionary approaches discussed above and has guided much research about both humans and other animals – in addition to guiding many of the assumptions we make about interactional behavior on a daily basis. Historically, theorists have attempted to categorize and analyze those needs that all humans have in common to better understand the relationship between individuals – and between the individual and the group.

In the 17th century, philosopher Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* argued that people are driven by two desires: *freedom from pain* and the *will to power* (Hobbes, 1651/1950; Catlin, 1939). These ideas remain with us today in slightly modified form. Contemporary social scientists have tried, like Hobbes, to make sense of those needs that drive humanity. Perhaps the best-known 20th century articulation of these notions is Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory. Maslow (1954) posited a multi-tiered hierarchy of needs: as one level of a person's needs was satisfied, he said, then that need will have little power to motivate that person. In this way, people move upward through the hierarchy, satisfying the individual levels of "basic" needs along the way (Cummings & Dunham, 1980). After moving through physiological needs (e.g., food, oxygen), people "progress" to the level of their safety needs (e.g., security, protection; freedom from fear, anxiety, and chaos). These needs, if left unsatisfied:

... may serve as the almost exclusive organizers of behavior, recruiting all the capacities of the organism in their service, and we may then fairly describe the whole organism as a safety-seeking mechanism. ... Practically everything looks less important than safety and protection. (Maslow, 1954: 39).
If an individual is able to satisfy safety needs, the next level of the hierarchy is “social” (Cummings & Dunham, 1980: 74), what Maslow called the “belongingness and love needs.” Without meeting these needs, the individual “will feel sharply the pangs of loneliness, of ostracism, of rejection, of friendlessness, of rootlessness” (Maslow, 1954: 43). Satisfying this level enables the individual to move onward and upward through the subsequent levels of esteem and self-actualization.\(^{28}\)

Other theorists have wrestled with this issue, as well. “Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory has received more attention during the past two decades than any other single theory of motivation and satisfaction. The impact of Herzberg’s work has been tremendous and will probably continue to be important” (Cummings & Dunham, 1980: 77). Herzberg, with echoes of Hobbesian ideas, posits that human beings have two basic sets of needs: avoidance of pain and pursuit of psychological growth (Herzberg, 1987). The ideas Herzberg presents continue to resonate (Frederick, 2001; Iverson, 2000; Knight & Westbrook, 1999; Utley et al., 1997); and theorists such as Miller (1998) argue that there are “two fundamental survival instincts, which we can label ‘pleasure-seeking’ and ‘pain avoidance’” which drive much human interaction (1998: 1499). The ideas of thinkers such as Herzberg and Maslow, then, conceptualize a world where people are indeed motivated by the fact that others can hurt them. How then does this fact make a difference in group interaction and group dynamics? That is part of the question addressed in this research.

\(^{28}\) While Maslow’s notion of a hierarchy of needs may be a useful conceptual tool in this context, there are a number of problems with the general applicability of Maslow's work (e.g., the unidirectional nature of his hierarchy, and the notion that only the “neurotic or near-neurotic” individual (1954: 41) still has any safety needs as active motivators). This proposal only draws upon Maslow’s articulation of the importance of satisfying safety needs in the context of group interaction — ideas that have had an impact on many facets of social psychology theory and research.
Psychoanalytic Theory and Group Dynamics

While much of the prominent social science thinking about behavior in small groups has come from the field of social psychology, the realm of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic theory has also made significant contributions to our understanding of group dynamics. Because of notable differences in outlook, methodology, and philosophy, there has often not been a great deal of overlap between psychoanalysis and social and organizational psychology (particularly with the latter). Hence, as psychoanalysis deals with the hard-to-characterize realm of feelings, it is often “at the margins” of work on organizational theory, and in many discussions “emotions and passions ... [are] seen as unwelcome intruders to the world of organizations, symptoms of pathologies, from which organizations had to rid themselves” (Gabriel, 1998: 292). OB researchers have noted that most of the research that even obliquely addresses emotionality in organizational contexts “underemphasizes” the intensity or importance of the emotions or the effect the interactions have on group interaction (Gayle & Preiss, 1998). Thus, while organizational scholars rarely ventured into the realm of psychoanalytic thinking to address their research questions, “the supposedly passion-free spaces of modern organizations (where precisely there is ‘too much organization’) were of relatively limited interest to psychoanalytic writers” (Gabriel, 1998: 296).

Typically, psychoanalytic theories may be based on empirical data, but they do not draw upon the same notions of scientific and experimental rigor as many of those derived from research in social psychology or organizational behavior. In the same way that a man’s physician and his lover might have radically different views of his body, different disciplines bring specific skills, strategies, interests, and assumptions to the study of groups.
Chapter 2

The work of Wilfred Bion

Probably the most influential thinker studying psychoanalytic aspects of group
dynamics was British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion (Armstrong, 1992; Stokes, 1994). As
Miller articulates it, “Bion’s theory has generated a voluminous literature, mainly in the
fields of psychoanalysis, group psychotherapy, and group dynamics” (1998: 1501). Not
surprisingly, Bion’s work builds, in part, on Freud’s notions of the unconscious,
transference, defense mechanisms, and totemic theory (Moxnes, 1998). However, unlike
many other psychiatrists doing group therapy, Bion worked hard to escape the temptation
of treating patients exclusively as individuals in the group, attempting to give significant
emphasis to issues that pertained to the group as a whole (Richardson, 1975).

Bion began his work in group relations by looking at the relationship between
psychoanalysis and behavior in groups. Many of his insights about human behavior seem
to have grown out of his experiences in war: He was a British tank commander in World
War I and a military psychiatrist in World War II (Bion, 1982). His autobiography
details his experiences in the first World War and how he learned firsthand about terror,
about the utter dread of annihilation, and about being in situations where you do not
know what you are doing or why you behaved as you did or how you even survived. By
World War II, he was able to apply some of his insights and ended up originating the
procedures by which British military officers were selected (Trist, 1985). In addition, he
went on to develop therapeutic “settings” where military officers who had experienced
nervous breakdowns could convalesce and work to regain their dignity and will to fight
(Bridger, 1985; Trist, 1985).

Bion describes in great detail how he accomplished this, by focusing on two
pivotal elements: (1) placing people in a situation where they were forced to cooperate

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and work for the good of the group as a whole and not merely for individual survival or
gain, and (2) creating an anxiety-producing situation where people could, he hoped, think
about what they were doing while they were doing it. His term for this was “thinking
under fire” (Bion, 1982) — thinking in the here and now and not just reflecting on things
that have already happened.

Bion contended that there was a particular key to making this process work: place
people in stress-inducing situations, he said, and you will summon forth their most
primitive anxieties (Bion, 1961, 1982; Duncan, 1995; Nitsun, 1994):

One of Bion’s unique contributions was to conceptualize group life as
more stressful, and the unconscious level of group processes as more
primitive, than previously described (Freud, 1921), because of the struggle
that group members have in balancing an instinctive desire to merge with
the group (much like an infant who does not differentiate from mother)
with the need to retain a sense of individual boundaries (Tischler et al,

Bion believed that groups, organizations, institutions of all sorts were created for
the purpose of restricting and containing these anxieties (Stokes, 1994). Echoing Freud’s
ideas, Bion believed, though, that groups do two somewhat contradictory things
simultaneously. Yes, he said, groups do protect from the ceaseless fear of destruction.
That is a key part of their appeal and their power. To do this, however, groups build
“defensive” interpersonal systems and patterns of behavior which are both appalling and
cruel. The defenses can take a variety of forms, including personal attack and fight,
social ostracism, flight, and rigidly enforced conformity. The systems and patterns, he
argued, come from unconscious fantasies at work in all group interactions.

After World War II, Bion began to run groups at the Tavistock Clinic in London
(in conjunction with Leicester University); other similar conferences soon followed, in
both the U.K. and the U.S., due in large part to the work of A. K. Rice (1965). As Bion continued his research in group dynamics, he began to make sense of his discoveries in terms of the work of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (Bion, 1961; Gabriel, 1998; Voyer, Gould, & Ford, 1997). Group relations conferences (often called Tavistock conferences) building on Bion’s groundbreaking work – providing the heuristic perspective for unraveling the unconscious functioning of groups – are now conducted regularly all over the world (Colman and Bexton, 1975; Colman and Geller, 1985; Debbane, 1995; Ettin, 1997; Hinshelwood, 1987; Lion & Gruenfeld, 1993; Miller, 1990a, 1990b).

**Bion’s Framework for Group Dynamics**

To understand the ways in which Bion’s theories apply to the functions of attack, pain, and danger in group dynamics, it is important to have a clear understanding of his conception of group processes in general. Based on his work with groups at the Tavistock institute and his own observations (but not on any kind of experimental research), Bion (1961) put forth his argument that within every group there are actually two groups present: (1) the *work group* and (2) the *basic assumption group*. What he means by calling these two different “groups” is that inside each group are two different ways of behaving (Rosenthal, 1996). There are not in reality two different groups of people in the room; the group, however, behaves as if there were two such groups present.

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29 Klein is often considered, after Freud, to be one of the most original psychoanalytic thinkers and clinicians. Also from Vienna, she lived in London much of her life. She focused on the psychoanalysis of children, particularly working to understand the content of primitive anxieties. Where Freud helped us understand and explore the unconscious, Klein saw herself articulating a way to understand the most primitive mechanisms and the most terrifying expressions of the violent and destructive components of human nature (Klein et al, 1952). She postulated a structuring process in which the psyche responds to anxiety by splitting off its desired, nurturing and loving parts from its unwanted, frighteningly aggressive, destructive, hateful and persecuting parts (Klein, 1975). Klein’s framework became an essential building block in Bion’s theories about group dynamics.
within its group (this is the group's unconscious fantasy)—two distinct configurations of mental activity (c.f., Gabriel, 1998; Horwitz, 1995; Stokes, 1994).

The work group, the more straightforward and easy to understand of these two concepts, is the aspect of the group that is focused on the task at hand. It is the group that is getting done what needs to be done: “Every group, however casual, meets to ‘do’ something” (Bion, 1961). The work group, then, is “that aspect of group functioning which has to do with the real task of the group. . . . The work group takes cognizance of its purpose and can define its task. The structure of the group is there to further the attainment of the task” (Rioch, 1975: 23). While in work group mentality, the group members “are intent on carrying out a specifiable task and want to assess their effectiveness in doing it” (Stokes, 1994: 20). The work group can be characterized by “expression of interest and posing of questions focused on the primary task of the group; recognition of one’s own and others’ individuality and responsibility for accomplishing the task” (Lion & Gruenfeld, 1993: 239). In Miller’s (1998) words, a work group has:

... met for some specific and agreed purpose or task. It has an organization appropriate to its task; it operates on the basis of rationality; members are valued for their contribution rather than for their status, and they recognize their interdependence; it has mechanisms for managing disagreements; it can tolerate turnover of members without fear of losing its identity, and it can recognize and face the need for change (Miller, 1998: 1498).

Quite simply, the work group is something with which we are all familiar. It is the committee that meets to plan an event, a staff meeting to develop a new mission statement, or a therapy group meeting to discuss personal problems and difficulties. But, the work group is only one piece of the puzzle, as Menzies Lyth points out:

The subtlety of Bion’s intuition was in pinpointing the less obvious but immensely powerful psychotic phenomena that appear in groups that are apparently behaving sanely, if a little strangely, groups that are working
more or less effectively and whose members are clinically normal or neurotic. (Menzies Lyth, 1981: 663).\footnote{Menzies Lyth's use of the term “psychotic” here means a “diminution of effective contact with reality.” In other words, mature and skillful individuals can respond to the powerful mentality of group culture by being temporarily ensnared in infantile regression, primitive splitting, projective identification, and depersonalization.}

These other, powerful phenomena, then, are what Bion calls the “basic assumptions” – and they are the source of much that is both difficult and delightful in group life.

*The Basic Assumptions*

Bion defines the other group present within every group as the *basic assumption group*. The basic assumption group goes hand-in-hand with the work group in the everyday functioning of the group; both are always present, although one or the other may be dominant at particular times in group life (Sutherland, 1985). “Work group activity is obstructed, diverted, and on occasion assisted, by certain other mental activities that have in common the attribute of powerful emotional drive. These activities, at first sight chaotic, are given a certain cohesion if it is assumed that they spring from basic assumptions common to all the group” (Bion, 1975: 14). In other words, the group operates *as if* certain things are true (Lion & Gruenfeld, 1993; Stokes, 1994). Thus, “collective unconscious assumptions (basic assumptions) are formed … which affect both individual and group behavior” (Gemmill & Oakley, 1992: 117).

Bion’s view is that there are three modalities of the basic assumption group: (1) *dependency*, (2) *fight-flight*, and (3) *pairing* (Braucher, 2000; Gabriel, 1998; Luft, 1970; Moxnes, 1998; Stein, 2000; Zaleznik, 1995). Each of these modalities has implications for the way the group behaves. And, while each basic assumption modality can operate quite independently of the others or can overlap with each other, all basic assumptions
have particular attributes in common, operate on the same levels of logical analysis as one another, and can interfere with the work group functioning:

When under the sway of a basic assumption, a group appears to be meeting as if for some hard-to-specify purpose upon which the members seem intently set. Group members lose their critical faculties and individual abilities, and the group as a whole has the appearance of having some ill-defined but passionately involving mission. Apparently trivial matters are discussed as if they were matters of life or death, which is how they may well feel to the members of the group, since the underlying anxieties are about psychological survival (Stokes, 1994: 22).

In the basic assumption modality of dependency, according to Bion, the group seeks support or assistance from someone (or something) that the group members believe is stronger than them. Groups in this modality operate as if their central goal is “to attain security through and have its members protected by one individual. It assumes that this is why the group has met” (Emphasis added. Rioch, 1975: 24). The group in dependency mode “seeks an omnipotent and omniscient leader who will care for their every need even as they resent their dependent state” (Braucher, 2000: 74). The group’s assumption in this mode is that they are incompetent or inadequate or immature (Turquet, 1985); thus, they require an all-powerful and all-knowing leader, a situation where the group leader is deified. The group sees this deification is an “antidote to deprivation” (Slater, 1966).³¹

When the group perceives itself as lacking and “assumes that one of its members is uniquely able to look after and satisfy its needs” (Stein, 2000: 196) – that the group’s only solution is for the leader to rescue them – then their behavior reflects that assumption. Gemmill and Oakley characterize a small group experiencing the basic

³¹ Hartmann and Gibbard (1985) raise Slater’s conception of Bion’s dependency modality and maintain that Slater’s concept of deification “is essentially Bion’s dependency assumption in religious form” (1985: 319).
assumption mode of dependency, saying that "the members want extremely simple explanations and act as if no one can do anything that is difficult" (1992: 121). Turquet evocatively and concretely describes the characteristic behavior of a group in basic assumption dependency mode:

Memories become poor. Time sense is impaired: "Some time back somebody said so and so." Living in the here and now seems very difficult, and there is a marked tendency to go back over past events: "What did we do last time?" There is a disturbed location of speaker: "Somebody over there, I forget who, said..." Sentences, especially if they seek to convey an explanation or insight, have to be simple and relatively short. The preference is for the leader to act without the group's having to indicate its action wishes: "How clever he is; see, he knew it all along." Indeed, in a [basic assumption dependency] group so strong is the wish for magic that all disasters are treated as signs of the most thoughtful planning. (1985: 360-361).

The group surrenders its will to a leader, believing that a "leader or authority system determines the norms, and boundaries of the group, and is largely responsible for its effectiveness" (Smith & Comer, 1994: 556). In this process, "members anoint leaders and de-skill themselves, and pressure their leaders to meet increasingly impossible dependency needs" (Kahn, 1995: 493). Thus, "the basic assumption leader is essentially a creation or puppet of the group, who is manipulated to fulfill its wishes and to evade difficult realities" (Stokes, 1994: 23). The reality, however, is that no group leader could possibly live up to the deification inherent in these expectations. By failing to accept or measure up to the envisioned omnipotent and omniscient image, the group's leader ultimately stirs up Counter-dependent feelings: frustration, disappointment, hostility, and outright anger (Kahn, 1995).

As a result, the group will try all kinds of strategies to get the leader to "rescue" them from their inadequacy and weakness – something Agazarian (1999) describes as the
group’s “dead in the water” tactics. When these fail (as they eventually must), the group will forsake the presumed leader and seek out replacement leaders (Hartmann & Gibbard, 1985) or possibly even replace leaders with “the equivalent of a sacred text which holds all the answers” (Miller, 1998: 1499). But, this strategy is equally doomed to end in frustration for the newly appointed leader and the group as a whole:

These [alternative leaders] are often eager to accept the role, and to prove that they can do what the original leader could not do. This is a temptation which the group offers to its more ambitious members. When they fall for it, they are usually in for the same fate as the original leader (Rioch, 1975: 25).

The second basic assumption is that of fight-flight. This is when the group uses the strategies of fight or flight (or both simultaneously) in the belief that these are the essential tasks of the group. In Bion’s framework, these two behaviors are simply opposite sides of the same coin, for the group believes that it “has met to fight something or to run away from it” (Bion, 1975: 18). Thus, fight/flight “occurs when the members of a group cease constructive problem solving either by (a) blaming all the group’s problems on an outside agent or (b) pretending that no problem exists” (Voyer, Gould, & Ford, 1997: 475).

For the group in this modality, “action is essential for the preservation of the group” (Rioch, 1975: 26). Fight may take on a variety of forms, including: denunciation of the group’s task or leader, an assault on a member of the group or another group “criticism of others, fighting among group members, and attempts by group members to draw the group leader into fighting” (Lion & Gruenfeld, 1993: 239). Bluntly, Miller writes of groups in fight mode that “an extreme example would be the lynch mob” (1998: 1497).
Flight, too, can take many forms, including: “avoidance of work by withdrawal, silence, or talking about an unrelated subject” (Lion & Gruenfeld, 1993: 239), creation of diversions (e.g., games) to occupy the time, or complete abandonment of the task or even the group’s designated setting (e.g., leaving the room, the building, etc.). As Gabriel describes it, “the fight or flight assumption commandeers many of the emotions characteristic of the paranoid-schizophrenic position: rage, hate, envy, destructiveness, and fear” (1998: 301). What is most important in this modality is action: immediate, recognizable, and dramatic action. To mobilize the group into action, a leader is required—one who can lead the group into battle or guide it into a safe haven. Braucher says that in fight-flight mode “the members will only follow one who will lead them in fight or flight; they resist talking and self examination and are insensitive to their own and other’s feelings” (2000: 74). As with all basic assumption groups, results must be immediate; there is a compelling, almost overriding need for instantaneous satisfaction. So, the designated fight or flight leader who cannot comply utterly with the basic assumption in operation is ignored or discarded.

The third basic assumption is that of pairing. A less “jarring” set of sensations than fight/flight mode, “the pairing assumption revolves around feelings of hope, optimism, confidence, and self-assurance” (Gabriel, 1998: 301). This is when the members, often unconsciously, believe that by joining with each other they will be able to cope with perceived problems or enhance group feelings of satisfaction. “Here the assumption is that the group has met for purposes of reproduction, to bring forth the Messiah, the Savior” (Rioch, 1975: 27). In this modality, the group will invest a great deal of energy into the pairing of two individuals (not necessarily a man and a woman, however). The group derives hope and excitement from the prospect that this pair—
representing the "primitive reproductive drive of the group" (Miller, 1998: 1497) — will somehow produce a new leader who will solve the problems the group is facing. And this solution will come "without any effort on [the group’s] part" (Gemmill & Oakley, 1992: 122) — and could take many forms, including "a social structure, a project, or new product" (Smith & Comer, 1994: 556). The basic assumption of pairing:

... is based on the collective and unconscious belief that, whatever the actual problems and needs of the group, a future event will solve them. The group behaves as if pairing or coupling between two members within the group, or perhaps between the leader of the group and some external person, will bring about salvation. The group is focused entirely on the future, but as a defence against the difficulties of the present (Stokes, 1994: 21).

Because the pairing mode is fundamentally about hope for the future, it is imperative that this pairing within the group itself not produce any actual or metaphorical progeny (Gemmill & Oakley, 1992):

For the feelings of hope to be sustained it is essential that the ‘leader’ of the group, unlike the leader of the dependent group and of the fight-flight group, should be unborn. It is a person or idea that will save the group — in fact from feelings of hatred, destructiveness, and despair, of its own or another group — but in order to do this, obviously the Messianic hope must never be fulfilled. Only by remaining a hope does hope persist. (Bion, 1975: 17).

In his descriptions, Bion argued that the three basic assumption groups have a number of things in common. Most importantly, all of them require instant gratification (Braucher, 2000). The groups are experiencing a particular need (e.g., an authority to lead them, the imperative to fight an enemy or run from it) and that need must be met as quickly as possible. As such, groups do not take time to think about, discuss, or weigh options and consider consequences. Instead, the emphasis is on impulsivity and non-rational processes. When in basic assumption mode, the motto of the group might be:
“Don’t confuse me with facts; I have my own ideas.” Their attitude toward knowledge is very similar to Goebbels’ attitude toward art. Being fearful of and aggressive toward knowledge, lacking the necessary predictive techniques, scornful of hypotheses, hence uninterested and unaware of consequences, they have little or no sense of collective responsibility. In the main, responsibility is left to the leader. External reality is regarded as a potential source of sudden unpleasantness and therefore to be avoided. (Turquet, 1985: 358).

Bion also saw the basic assumption group as primarily anonymous; in other words, no individual member of the group can or is willing to “own” the group’s ideas or actions (Debbane, 1995). Like the lynch mob (Miller, 1998), basic assumption groups “can function quite ruthlessly” (Riocch, 1975: 28). By placing individual group members in fixed roles (e.g., the clown, the nurturer, the rebel, the touchy-feely person)\(^\text{32}\) from which they cannot seem to break out (Malcus, 1995), the group can live vicariously when in basic assumption mode. Thus, the *unconscious* “thinking” might go something like this: “I don’t have to get in touch with my anger because [the rebel] is doing all the work of venting fury at the group leader.” They ensnare each other, using projective mechanisms (cf., Braucher, 2000; Horwitz, 1985; Klein et al, 1952), in the particular roles required by the group to fulfill its fantasy (its “as if” framework). Bion argues that they cannot then be treated as autonomous individuals, as they could be when in work group mode. This is because in basic assumption mode in particular, group members are not acting as individuals: they are giving voice to group phenomena (Mayerson, 2000), or adopting roles projected on to them by the group (cf., Malcus, 1995).\(^\text{33}\) Instead it is

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\(^{32}\) There are a variety of potential roles within group life, and not a particular, enumerated universe from which to select. While Moxnes (1999) posits that there are 12 “archetypal” roles in groups, other theorists such as Hare (1994) and Malcus (1995) describe a more general and variegated system of role assignment and adoption in group life.

\(^{33}\) In work group mode, by contrast, group members recognize their emotional states and take responsibility for their own actions (Kuriloff, Babad, & Kline, 1988; Lion & Gruenfeld, 1993); as such, they act with greater autonomy and individuality than is possible in basic assumption mode.
only the group as a whole that can be understood and addressed: individuals are not their own autonomous selves but object representations in the group mind (Alford, 1995a; Bion, 1961; Ettin, 1996a; Mayerson, 2000; Pines, 1994; Pinney, 1996; Wells, 1985).

Finally, to bring all of these various roles and representations together, all basic assumption groups presume the existence of a leader (although, as Bion has argued, in the pairing group, the leader is not yet born). And, a common theme of all basic assumption groups is the constant attempt to “seduce their leaders away from the work function” (Rioch, 1975: 28) so that there will be no (autonomous) individual present as a constant reminder of the responsibilities, realities, and tasks of the work group (Agazarian, 1999; Rosenthal, 1996).

It is not that the work group is pure good and the basic assumption group is pure evil; Bion’s (1961) conception is that each of these is a fundamental element in groups. Any group (or individual, for that matter) who did nothing but work without ever taking time for playing games or running away or having someone else take charge would find itself burnt out (or worse) very soon.

The work group exists when members take up their roles in relation to the primary task. However, complex and uncertain environments tend to generate anxiety and thus the basic assumption group is never likely to be far away (Bion, 1961; Lion & Gruenfeld, 1993; Rioch, 1975). The issue in understanding both work group and basic assumption group functioning is to recognize that all groups need to strike a balance between the two; both are fundamental, and the “mix” will vary from group to group.34

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34 It is possible to think about the work group and basic assumption groups, in part, as analogous to Freud’s (1921, 1930) concepts of the ego/superego and id (cf., Ehrlich, 1996). Work group functioning can be seen as roughly equivalent to the intrapsychic functioning of the ego in that participants in the work group rationally assess their situation and take actions that will achieve their task, so adapting themselves to reality. However, when anxiety levels rise, groups defend themselves by regressing to the
Chapter 2

The role of “valency”

For Bion, this “mix” depends in part upon what he called an individual’s valency (Alford, 1995a; Lion & Gruenfeld, 1993). Physicists employ the designation “valency” for the “inclination” of an atom to combine with other particles. Bion borrowed the term from researchers like Kurt Lewin (who had introduced it originally to the realm of psychology) and applied it to the group’s “capacity for instantaneous, involuntary combination of one individual with another for sharing and acting on a basic assumption” (1961: 153). Thus, valency is the “individual’s readiness to enter into combination with the group in making and acting on the basic assumptions” (Rioch, 1975: 29). In other words, valency is the degree to which a person (or a group) is willing to be, for example, heavily dependent on the leader; or how strongly they are attracted to fight or flight in a given situation (Kraus, 1997). Thus, it is not sufficient or accurate to say that a particular individual is “dependent.” Instead, valency is a way of helping us think about an individual’s tendency to engage in a particular behavior in a particular context, and people can vary greatly in the strength of their tendency in a specific direction.

In addition to variation in the strength of our valencies, we also vary in the direction of our valencies. Thus, some people will be valent toward dependency, others toward fight-flight, and others toward pairing (Bion, 1961). It is possible for anyone to be valent toward all three basic assumptions, Bion argues, but more typically people have one particular valence that is stronger than the other two. Valency is not, in Bion’s view, a negative judgment or some sort of psychological problem. It is simply part of human psychological make-up. Thus, the work group and the basic assumption group are not

35 There does not seem to be any kind of valency “away from” the basic assumption modalities; if there were, it would be another way to describe work group behavior.
mutually exclusive; the two coexist. And, depending on the particular dynamics of the moment, the operating basic assumption can either uphold or undermine the function of the work group. In some cases, the valence toward one or the other basic assumptions can meet the group’s needs in very powerful ways. For example, a fight-flight valence may be desirable for a military (or a political) campaign, dependency desirable for a hospital setting or an audience attending to a lecture. If another basic assumption were in operation instead, it could significantly hinder the work and facilitate a particularly dysfunctional group culture (Miller, 1998). And, as Rioch articulates so clearly:

... an effective society uses the valencies of its members to serve its various purposes. For example, the educator can find a good outlet for his valency toward basic assumption dependency. The combat commander can use appropriately his valency toward basic assumption fight-flight. The valency toward basic assumption pairing finds a useful expression in individual interviewing and, of course, family life. There are various types of chairmen and directors of organizations. One type will be solicitous for the welfare of his members and will take a special interest in the weaker ones or in anyone who is sick or disabled. Another will see his main function as fighting for the interests of his organization against any outside or inside attack. Another will find that he does his job best by going around after hours to each one of his members separately, convincing each one of what he wants done. When the meeting takes place everyone is already in agreement and the decisions have all been made. Any and all of these ways can be effective, though each one may be more appropriate at one time than at another (1975: 30).

36 Typically, when in basic assumption mode, one basic assumption will predominate at a given moment in a group’s existence. The basic assumption in operation is usually a factor of the combination of the valences of the group’s members. Thus, a group with a large number of members with dependent/counterdependent valences (or a powerful core of such members) will likely experience the dependency basic assumption in operation. Fight/flight and pairing may play roles at other times in the group’s life.
There are many illustrations in both individual experience and social history of what happens when the work group and basic assumption group go completely out of balance and the basic assumption behaviors become the dominant force. For Bion, the work group requires skill and effort; the basic assumption group “requires no training, experience, or mental development” at all (Bion, 1975: 18).

Groups can accomplish many wonderful things, making major advances in human development in science, literature, politics, the arts and many other fields. They can do this when the work group is dominant and in control of the group’s functioning. But, groups equally have the capacity for destructive behavior when the basic assumption groups usurp power:

Bion thinks that there is not actually so much danger as people think there is of being overwhelmed by the basic assumptions. He has a healthy respect for people’s capacities to function on a work level. He thinks that in groups met to study their own behavior, consistent interpretation of the basic assumption tendencies will gradually bring them into consciousness and cause them to lose their threatening quality (Rioch, 1975: 31).

Rioch then goes on to give us a poetic statement of the productive and destructive power in groups as understood by Bion:

When anxiety becomes severe the group may, as Bion says, resemble the mysterious, frightening, and destructive Sphinx. The Sphinx was made up

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37 It is important to remember that these are merely Bion’s theories about the components of group behavior; as such, the notions of “balance,” “purpose,” and “work” ultimately remain unresolved pieces. It is not always easy (or even possible) to provide a concrete articulation of the definition of “work” for a given group. Thus, while Bion’s theories may help analyze some of the aspects of both work and basic assumption behaviors in a group, they represent merely rough guides in the analysis – and are far from definitive classifications or answers about group dynamics.

38 If basic assumption behavior becomes a more permanent state of group life, then the more likely it is that mature and skillful individuals will become caught up in the basic assumption phenomena of their groups, organizations, or societies. This idea is reflected in Winnicott’s (1950) thought-provoking analysis of the meaning of democracy: More than 40 years ago, he argued that democracy is a relatively fragile achievement because it is in constant struggle with the basic assumption aspects of human interaction which could become the dominant force in a society at any time.
of disparate members. She had the seductive face of a woman and a body composed of parts of powerful and dangerous animals — the lion, the eagle, and the serpent. To those who wished to pass by her, she posed [a] riddle. ... When the Sphinx lies in wait with her dreadful question, representing the frightening complexity and uncertain behavior of the world, especially the world of groups, one feels terrified at what John Fowles calls 'the eternal source of all fear, all horror, all real evil, man himself' (Fowles, 1967, p. 448). But the same man or the same group which has filled the world with horror at its capacity for evil can also amaze by its capacity for good. (1975: 32-33).

The influence of Bion's theories

Bion's ideas have been highly influential — generating "a voluminous literature" (Miller, 1998: 1506) in the fields of psychoanalysis, group psychotherapy, small group research, and group dynamics — and many psychoanalytic thinkers have drawn upon Bion's theoretical framework and notions of work group and basic assumption group behavior (e.g., Agazarian, 1999; Braucher, 2000; Dunphy, 1974; Ehrlich, 1996; Hartman & Gibbard, 1974; Hirschhorn, 1991; Menzies-Lyth, 1990; Redlich & Astrachan, 1975; Richardson, 1975; Zaleznik, 1995). And, psychoanalytic theory, in turn, has contributed to our understanding of what goes on in groups and organizational settings (e.g., Gabriel, 1998; Gould, 1991; Halton, 1994; Smith & Berg, 1995; Smith & Zane, 1999). Many theorists, in fact, contend that "looking at an institution through the spectrum of psychoanalytical concepts is a potentially creative activity which may help in understanding and dealing with certain issues" (Halton, 1994: 11):

Bion's theory has received extensive support from the work of organizational researchers and consultants, who have found in it a valuable key for unlocking the emotional tangles of work groups, especially highly ineffectual ones. Many writers with a psychodynamic perspective have employed basic-assumption theory first to analyze group functioning and then to effect change, restoring the group to its task. (See, e.g., Diamond, 1993; Hirschhorn, 1988; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984; Krantz, 1989.) (Gabriel, 1998: 302).
It is within the parameters of Bion’s basic assumption group behaviors that we will probably find much of the attack, pain, and danger inflicted in group life. A research program to make sense of attack in group life, therefore, is aided if the basic assumption behaviors are highlighted and magnified — where the heightened manifestations of basic assumption modalities can be more easily subject to observation and scrutiny. By putting the basic assumption phenomena into clearer relief through the amplified anxiety-inducing process of Tavistock-type groups such as Psych 601, the researcher can more readily examine the impact of such phenomena during a sustained, concentrated group experience. This dissertation research provided such a forum and opportunity for the study of basic assumption behavior in groups and the ways in which attack, pain, and danger function in group life.

"Group Dynamics" Theory

Much has been written about how groups operate — and the field of “Group Dynamics” has been one that has grown and adapted over the years. The first group dynamics training programs from the 1950s grew out of Kurt Lewin’s groundbreaking work (Moreland, 1996; Yalom, 1976; Zaleznik, 1995). In writings about group dynamics, mention is made of the group’s experience of pain and danger. Yet, most commonly, the concepts are simply passing references — and rarely a central idea for analysis or exploration. For more than three decades, theorists have discussed the detailed workings of group behavior — the varied and many nuances of group interaction (e.g., Alford, 1995a; Bexton, 1975; Dugo & Beck, 1984; Elrick, 1977; Gemmill, 1986b; Horwitz, 1985, 1995; Lipgar, 1992; Luft, 1970; Miller, 1990a, 1990b, 1998; Obholzer, 1994; Rice, 1975; Slater, 1966; Smith, 1982; Taylor, Smith, & Kuriloff, in press; Tischler et al, 1986; Turquet, 1985; Wright et al, 1988; Yalom & Lieberman, 1972).
While Bion has doubtlessly been the most influential thinker with application to group dynamics theory — and his work is cited prominently and repeatedly in research over the past 40 years — his is not the only framework with which to approach group dynamics. More recently, Smith & Berg (1987, 1989, 1995) have attempted to articulate an innovative structure for making sense of overall group processes. The fundamental concept of their framework is also the title of their 1987 book: *Paradoxes of Group Life*. For Smith and Berg, the tensions of group life are present because members constantly confront a variety of paradoxes — dilemmas which end up making them feel like they’re enmeshed in dichotomous, either/or situations. In other words, group members feel caught between a series of very powerful opposing or contradictory forces. Some of these paradoxes include: individual versus group; leadership versus leaderlessness; boundary versus freedom; engagement versus detachment; disclosure versus privacy; trust versus suspicion; safety versus vulnerability. The significance of these kinds of paradoxes in group life is that for group members:

... tension is generated when links between the contradictory emotions and reactions evoked within individuals, within groups, and between individuals and groups are unrecognized (1987: 108).

Thus, the group grapples with the many different paradoxes, and these struggles themselves increase the tension and discomfort of group life, which in turn increases the intensity of the dichotomy of the paradox. Only by attending to the emotional states, Smith and Berg argue, can groups begin to make sense of the group dynamic and, in some cases, defuse the uncomfortable sensations. For them, using paradoxes to interpret and make sense of group dynamics provides an added tool for illuminating complex interpersonal processes. Thus, for example:
... if a group-based paradoxical interpretation were adopted, it might be argued that the very expression of vulnerability triggered its counterside, such as the existence of frightening forces that needed to be denied to maintain a sense of safety, on the one hand, and the fact that some significant level of trust was being enacted in the mere voicing of these concerns, on the other. Then the expression of defensive reassurance, such as “What is there to be afraid of here? No one is going to hurt you,” and “This is a really trusting group when people can talk about such things so openly,” are the complementary expressions of the unspoken aspects of the statements about vulnerability (1987: 162).

Smith and Berg have published a number of different books, chapters, and articles on this topic (e.g., Smith & Berg, 1987, 1989, 1995; Berg & Smith, 1990) – and their ideas are thought-provoking and rather intriguing as another lens through which to view group life. *Paradoxes of Group Life* (Smith & Berg, 1987) is one of Psych 601’s required readings; on occasion, the Consultants make us of a paradox-based paradigm to frame interventions and help groups make sense of overall group dynamics. These interventions, rather than being framed in work group and basic assumption group terminology, might be articulated to help the group identify the paradox with which it is struggling, or the seemingly repetitive nature of that struggle.

Despite the compelling and, in parts, innovative nature of their proposed analytical framework, their work does not appear to have resonated strongly within the group dynamics or psychoanalytic literature. Stokes (1994), for example, talks momentarily about the very same ideas of paradox in group life: “We experience the tension between the wish to join together and the wish to be separate; between the need for togetherness and belonging and the need for an independent entity” (1994: 19) – yet never mentions Smith and Berg. Agazarian (1999) refers to the contradiction of a group which “unwittingly reproduced in the group the very conditions, and the very roles, that they have entered the group to change” (1999: 88) with no mention of *Paradoxes of Group Life*.
Group Life (1987) or its authors’ subsequent publications. And Bettenhausen (1991), reviewing several years of group research, only briefly mentions Smith and Berg’s (1987) work, saying simply that the authors “made an interesting point” (1991: 366). In other words, it is rare to find more than passing reference to their ideas in the contemporary literature – and even rarer to find mention of Smith and Berg’s particular works – while numerous writers build entire theoretical propositions grounded in the works of Bion (1961, 1975, 1982). It is not clear yet, of course, what role Smith and Berg’s ideas of paradox will eventually play in shaping the theory and literature on group dynamics; for the moment, however, they do not seem to have struck a chord within the field. While Smith and Berg have articulated a very compelling set of theories, in the context of this dissertation work, in particular, it is principally Bion’s framework which provides the strong analytical support and flexibility for the analysis of the pain, danger, and attack in group life.

While groups’ experiences of pain and danger are frequently mentioned in group dynamics theory and research, they are not usually prominent features of the overall analysis. Hirschhorn, for example, talks about pain in organizational dynamics; in The Workplace Within (1988), he builds on his expertise in organizational behavior to examine how the anxiety which is present in all organizational settings provokes primal concerns about annihilation, leading to the manifestation of social defense mechanisms, which in turn leads to inflicting pain on others. Pain is, thus, simply a little-analyzed result of organizational processes. Others, such as Van Buskirk and McGrath (1999) see similar dynamics in organizations, enhancing members’ sense of danger, and they write that “organizations, then, are settings for existential dramas in which the stakes are the individual’s identity” (1999: 813). And while the stakes are high for group members, the
authors do not focus on the role that the potential pain and danger play in the process.

Touching directly on the pain in group life, Kraus (1997) writes that:

... although the hostility of some group environments is not illusory – and the direct and open expression of fear and anger toward being [existing] a healthy response – much of what is perceived in early group life as threatening or unsafe is a distortion based on the predisposition group members have to mismanage their own and others' feelings of aggression (1997: 134).

It is commonly assumed that openly arguing with another person in the group is undesirable and is generally avoided as the group attempts to maintain its equilibrium rationalized to serve the group’s “best interests.” The group’s refrain often is “Let’s keep things on track,” or “Don’t upset the apple cart” – phrases designed to preserve the illusion that the group is harmonious and moving in the right direction (Kraus, 1997: 142).

Rice, meanwhile, makes similar arguments and cautions that the “mitigation of pain, however desirable, may, unless we are careful, become self-defeating because real learning will not occur, and the skill will not be acquired” (1975: 72). Rice later goes on to say that what both the group as a whole and the individual members fear is “the undirected, unstructured power of the group, the fear of its potential violence” (1975: 114) and that “flight is from fear of the potential violence of unstructured groups” (1975: 130). Thus, even though he is clearly aware of group fears of pain and danger, his work focuses on many aspects of the ways groups operate and learn, but rarely explicitly examines the role of pain and danger in this process. Horwitz’s (1985) analysis of projective identification argues that the “painful” instances of “role suction” (where a group member is virtually compelled to adopt and maintain a particular role in the group) “are instructive lessons in the regressive potential of the unstructured group and, in particular, the impact and potency of projective identification” (1985: 34) – without
examination of the ways that pain operates in the group’s “instructive lessons”
themselves.

Describing the behavior in Tavistock-type groups, Redlich and Astrachan (1975) write that the group work:

... is often impeded by the group’s indulgence in immature and infantile behavior. It is appropriate to speak of such infantile group behavior, usually characterized by irrational anxiety, rage, and depression, as group regression. All groups under stress become regressive. (1975: 233).

Whether or not this is so, they do not examine the specific workings of the group’s regressive behaviors. Rioch’s (1975) detailed discussions of Bion’s theories about behavior in groups talks, in passing, about the group’s fear of “ruthless” behaviors (1975: 28). Harvey’s (1988) popular description of the “Abilene Paradox” says that “ostracism is one of the most powerful punishments that can be devised” (1988: 26) – and then proceeds to discuss the many other group behaviors that lead to the creation of the Paradox.

More recently, Sell and Wilson (1999) discuss “trigger strategies,” those mechanisms designed to punish transgression by, for example, withdrawing group cooperation. While they discuss the implementation of trigger strategies in detail, the focus of their research is primarily on decision-making and overall group collaboration. And Gemmill and Oakley (1992) also focus directly on pain, writing that:

... when pain is coupled with an inordinate, widespread, and pervasive sense of helplessness, social myths about the need for great leaders and magical leadership emerge from the primarily unconscious collective feeling that it would take a miracle or messiah to alleviate or ameliorate this painful form of existence (1992: 117).

The pain, then, is a prelude to group struggles about leadership and not a locus of analysis itself.
One of the few pieces to focus more directly on pain and danger in group life was Taylor, Smith, and Kuriloff's recent (in press) article focusing on the "anatomy of a casualty," in which they examine the ways in which the individual and group-level issues contributed to the "adverse effects" experienced by one particular group member (psychiatric problems which were exacerbated during his self-study group experience and required several days hospitalization for mental health observation). Compellingly, Taylor and her colleagues consider the group casualty within the framework of a group-as-a-whole analysis, thus locating the member's emotional decompensation within the overall group dynamic. On the whole, however, pain and danger figure as more marginal issues in the bulk of the group dynamics literature.

Pain and danger are certainly recognized as playing a role in group dynamics, but most of the theorists in the field do not seem to focus on their impact on group behavior. Perhaps Alford says it most succinctly when he describes the chaos of the group experience and declares that "pure chaos is pure terror" (1995a: 133). The question, then, is how do the groups manage this terror? And how does the terror serve them? The research in this dissertation has focused explicitly on the impact of attack-related pain and danger in groups – and on the ways in which they affect group behavior.

**Theoretical Underpinnings of Psychology 601**

The theoretical framework for Psych 601 (the research context of this dissertation) comes, in part, from Bion's pioneering work to understand human interaction in face-to-face settings. And Psych 601 is part of a decades-long tradition of Tavistock conferences. These conferences and courses such as Psych 601 have been offered throughout the United States and worldwide since the 1950s. Working from the
framework of Bion’s theories and Tavistock practice, and incorporating the ideas of the stages of group development articulated by Bennis and Shepard (1956), Psych 601 is a for-credit, graduate-level learning experience to teach about group dynamics. Along with Bion’s Tavistock framework for group dynamics, it is Bennis and Shepard’s conceptual model that guides many of the structural principles of Psych 601.

**Stages of Group Development**

In their influential article on “A Theory of Group Development” (1956) — derived from years of teaching group dynamics — Bennis and Shepard complement the work of Bion and others to articulate a theory of group progress (Agazarian, 1999; Kraus, 1997; Luft, 1970; McCollom, 1995b). In their model, there are two major areas of “internal uncertainty” in group development: (1) *Dependence* (authority relations), and (2) *Interdependence* (personal relations). While the model discusses them as distinct areas within group development, it also makes clear that they are not separate spheres of experience or existence. Coming from the perspective that the purpose of the group dynamics training was to improve internal communication in groups, Bennis and Shepard write that the:

... core of the theory of group development is that the principal obstacles to the development of valid communication are to be found in the orientations toward authority and intimacy that members bring to the group. Rebelliousness, submissiveness, or withdrawal as the characteristic response to authority figures; destructive competitiveness, emotional exploitiveness, or withdrawal as the characteristic response to peers (1956: 129).

The key concept here is that the group is wrestling with two major issues in Bennis and Shepard’s framework: (1) *how to deal with authority*, and (2) *how to deal with peers*. It is these two phases that all groups confront as they develop as a group. In both phases,
the group will pass through various subphases, according to Bennis and Shepard. These subphases evoke the terminology and philosophy of Bion's work, and make more explicit particularly salient features of each step in the process. The subphases of Phase I (Dependence) are:

1. Dependence-Flight
2. Counterdependence-Fight
3. Resolution-Catharsis

The subphases of Phase II (Interdependence) are:

4. Enchantment-Flight
5. Disenchantment-Fight
6. Consensual Validation

Within this framework, there is a "definite order of progression" (Bennis & Shepard, 1956: 141). In other words, Bennis and Shepard believe that groups must first deal with authority issues before they can interact responsibly with one another.

One can see how these subphases manifest themselves in the context of Tavistock-type group relations work (Wheelan, 1994). Group members are put in situations where anxieties are - quite deliberately - evoked by the staff and the structure of the training program. It is possible to see these anxieties in action and to think about and analyze them. For example, in Psych 601:

... the consultant does not respond directly to students' questions nor does he/she attempt to engage the students nonverbally. The structure of the course lies in the syllabus where course requirements are clearly articulated, the circular seating arrangement, and the consultant's strict observance of the time limits of group sessions. The consultant clearly violates the norms of conventional teaching and social decorum. (Kuriloff and Santoro, 1988: 7).

The group members quickly realize that this is far from their traditional experience in a graduate class and that they are not going to be taught in a conventional fashion.
(Armstrong, 1992); this realization produces considerable anxiety.\(^3\) As Redlich and Astrachan (1975) hypothesize, “without instructions other than the open-ended request to explore its own behavior, the group consequently falls back on primitive, previously acquired behavior patterns” (1975: 226).

The behavior of the Consultant increases anxiety because the Consultant does not behave like a typical leader in an academic context (Zaleznik, 1995). Instead, the Consultant seems “withdrawn” and uncooperative to the group members. Consultants only speak – make “interventions” (Ettin, 1997; Smith & Comer, 1994) – if their interventions will further the learning of the group. This behavior, however, heightens the group’s valency toward dependence (subphase 1) until members can no longer accept the way the Consultant is acting. Eventually, there is enough counter-dependent energy (subphase 2) to lead to a rebellion against the Consultant’s authority (Agazarian, 1999). In the context of Psych 601, this rebellion can take many forms (e.g., walking out of the room en masse; locking the Consultants out of the room; tearing up the Consultants’ name tags; moving all the chairs to exclude the Consultants; removing the Consultants’ chairs from the room or the circle). The important thing, though, is to understand that rebellion represents an “explosion” of pent-up emotions (fear, anger, frustration) that is finally released (subphase 3).

After successfully rebelling, the group is now able to “deal with” some of its issues related to authority – and begin to work toward understanding how individual and group responses to authority in the group manifested themselves and affected behavior.

\(^3\) Babad & Kuriloff’s research (1983) provides support for the argument that the Consultant’s unconventional behavior facilitates learning that is unobtainable through more traditional teaching methods.
and interaction. Slater’s (1966) analysis conceptualizes the group’s rebellion as a form of “communal killing and communal devouring” which:

... express the fact that before a group can become united around a set of principles, it must (a) rid itself of the fantasy of a living omnipotent protector, (b) separate the valued principles from their living vehicle, and (c) make them available to all on an equal basis. The cannibalistic fantasy thus leads to the idea that the “totemic principle” resides in every group member, and this in turn necessitates collective acceptance of the unprotected situation in which the group functions, and of the responsibility for what has happened and will happen in the group. (Emphasis in original. 1966: 147).40

Thus, Slater and others (e.g., Alford, 1995a, 1995b) conceptualize the rebellion as akin to Freud’s primal horde: the children murder and eat the parent, and attempt to re-build a society out of their concurrent chaos, depression, and euphoria.

After the rebellion, the group members can move toward dealing with one another more directly and effectively (Phase II: Interdependence). In this phase, the group may at first be euphoric from its successful overthrow of the Consultant (subphase 4), but will quickly move toward a realization of the fact that their peers are still present and that they have, as yet, unresolved feelings toward one another that have an impact on group behavior (subphase 5). Finally, the group begins to build on its skills in exploring their own behavior in the here and now (developed in addressing their issues around authority following subphase 3) and can start to communicate more clearly with one another about one another (subphase 6).

40 Slater (1966) works from the idea of the “Totem Feast” in discussing the group’s need to eliminate the living leader, writing that “the living sacred king is slain so that the god (fantasy) in him may be preserved and purified of his contaminating influence. ... It is after all an axiom of oracular religion that the most effective prophets are dead ones, by virtue of their connection with the nether world and their having been purged of the slag of reality” (1966: 145).
As the group’s behavior toward authority has shifted over the course of the subphases, so too the Consultant’s behavior shifts. “The consultant’s behavior is deliberate and loosely determined by the stage of the group’s development” (Kuriloff and Santoro, 1988: 8). When the Consultant is no longer deified (Gabriel, 1997; Slater, 1966) and the group begins to find its own authority, then the Consultant is able to deal more interactively with the other group members. He or she may answer direct questions, make eye contact, or even work individually with a particular member if it seems beneficial for the individual and the group. “After the issue of authority is thoroughly examined, the content of the [Consultant’s] interventions focus on the second central learning objective of the course, intragroup processes” (Kuriloff and Santoro, 1988: 10. Emphasis added.). Thus, as the group progresses from Dependence to Interdependence, the Consultant’s role shifts concurrently.

This is, very briefly stated, Bennis and Shepard’s conception of how groups progress through stages of development in a group dynamics training context. It is, some might argue quite accurately, an idealized version of group development. And, while few groups may progress in such a neat, linear fashion through the various phases and subphases, Bennis and Shepard’s framework provides a template with which we can interpret and analyze overall dynamics in small groups in Tavistock-type conferences and group process experiences such as Psych 601.

Bennis and Shepard are by no means the first or only researchers to articulate theories of group development. Many others over the past few decades (e.g., Anderson, 41

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41 The Consultant is a member of the small group, although as the institutional authority figure clearly not on the same terms as the students in Psych 601. While indeed one of the people sitting in the circle in the small group, the Consultant is not “equal” to the others in the room; from the perspective of the students and of the university, the Consultant is the course’s professor.
1979; Bales & Strodtbeck, 1951; Beck, 1974, 1981; Beck et al 1989; Broome & Fulbright, 1995; Cissna, 1984; Garland, Kolodny, & Jones, 1965; Gersick, 1988; Hare, 1973; McClure, 1998; Moreland & Levine, 1992; Morgan, Salas, & Glickman, 1993; Smith & Gemmill, 1991; Srivastva et al, 1977; Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; White, McMillen, & Baker, 2001; Worchel, 1994) have articulated significant and influential theoretical models to explain the various stages groups go through. For example, Anderson (1979) proposed group development stages he referred to as TACIT (trust, autonomy, closeness, interdependence, and termination). Smith and Gemmill (1991), on the other hand, suggest that the change is continuously taking place in the midst of turbulent or near-chaotic conditions. Garland, Kolodny, and Jones (1965) suggest a life cycle model of group development, meaning that as groups develop, members psychologically prepare for the group’s dissolution. Srivastva et al (1977) posited a five-stage model focusing on a progression through three basic social elements: inclusion, influence, and intimacy. Similarly, Moreland and Levine (1988, 1992) propose that members move through a sequence of relationships with the group, and that every stage of the relationship incorporates distinct behaviors and perceptions of the group.

For Morgan and his colleagues (1993), however, groups and teams develop not through a specific linear progression, but through a variety of alternative paths rather than a unitary sequence of developmental phases. Worchel (1994) championed more of a modified stage-based framework, proposing a model of group development with six stages (Discontent, Precipitating Incident, Identification, Group Productivity, Individuation, and Decay) which operate in a cyclical fashion; his ideas of the cyclical nature is echoed in McClure’s (1998) writings, as well. Beck (1974, 1981) suggested an overlapping, nine-phase theory of group development; and Tuckman (1965) and
Tuckman & Jensen (1977), with an alliterative flourish, have famously described the stages as forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (this last phase was added in 1977).

Despite the diversity of models of group development, the focus in the context of this dissertation research, however, has been on the Bennis and Shepard (1956) model of Dependence and Interdependence. Agazarian (1999) points out that today “there is greater acceptance of the idea that there are indeed distinct phases of group development that can be observed to follow the sequence that Bennis and Shepard (1956) outlined” (1999: 83). The emphasis on the Bennis and Shepard model is, however, not because it is the “best” or “right” or “most popular” model, but because it is the primary group development model that serves as part of the theoretical foundation for the Tavistock-type framework of Psych 601.
**Chapter Three: The Research Methodology**

Life must be lived forwards, but can only be understood backwards.

-Søren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life’s Way*.

The work of the poet is to name the unnameable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep.

-Salman Rushdie, *Satanic Verses*

**Background to the Research**

My interest in this research question stemmed from my concerns about the ways human beings treat one another – about the experiences of and reasons for the practice of hurting others in a group setting. Why do members of groups attack one another? How is attack expressed and experienced in group life? What purpose does it serve? Does it indeed function as a form of normative enforcement? Are there other (i.e., less painful) ways of enforcing and maintaining behavioral norms? I believe that these questions resonate in some way for all people – affecting understanding not just of scapegoating on playgrounds or in families, but in considering the savage actions of universe-shattering
Group process trainings are not in any way a cure-all for pain and danger in the world. They may, however, be able to increase our awareness of what groups are doing and why they are doing it. And, for the researcher, they can provide the laboratory for exploring and analyzing these aspects of human behavior. The use of group research to enhance our understanding of social dynamics and help eliminate social ills has a long history within the field. In the eyes of Kurt Lewin, considered by many to be the “father” of the study of group dynamics, the chief value of group research embraced the solution of social and organizational problems, and not simply the resolution of theoretical issues (Moreland, 1996).

My initial exposure to “Group Processes” was in January, 1986 when I enrolled in Psych 601 as a graduate student participant coming to the class with no prior group dynamics training, as part of the coursework for my Master’s degree. Years later, after returning to school for a Ph.D., I opted to enroll in “Advanced Group Processes” (Psych 701) to continue my learning about group dynamics.

I began the observations and research for this dissertation expecting to focus on something related to personal influence and power in face-to-face settings. During my first period of group observation (in 1994), however, I was struck by the consistent and insistent ability of the group to inflict pain on members. Not physical violence, of course (this was, after all, a graduate course at a respected university); but, pain nonetheless. Using various means, the group succeeded in ridiculing, silencing, or ostracizing
particular members at times throughout the conference. Why was this happening? What brought it about? And, if it were indeed an integral part of the group dynamic, then what function did it serve for the group? Thus, I began to formulate a very general research question and continue with collecting data. Fred Erickson (1986a) discusses the interpretive approach to research and writes that this is a fairly normal process in qualitative studies, particularly those involving fieldwork.

It is ... true that the researcher always identifies conceptual issues of research interest before entering the field setting. In field work, induction and deduction are in constant dialogue. As a result, the researcher pursues deliberate lines of inquiry while in the field, even though the specific terms of inquiry may change in response to the distinctive character of events in the field setting. (1986a: 121).

The research process did not begin as an exploration of the nature of attack, pain, and danger in group life. Over the course of the observations of the different groups as part of Psych 601 (over a two-year period), my research question evolved. After a series of initial observations, I began to ponder a research question generally concerned with pain and danger. I did not have any concrete ideas, however, about the causes or manifestations of the pain and danger I observed in the groups. The more concrete ideas about the phenomenon of group attack and its attendant causes and consequences did not emerge until I began the process of sifting through the data to develop conceptual categories.

This approach had certain advantages and disadvantages. It did mean that my data collection process was not explicitly focused on narrowly-tailored research questions and could, therefore, mean that I did not observe or note particular moments in group life that could have directly addressed particular questions or issues. At the same time, however, it meant that I was also not observing with a particular bias; in other words, I
was not looking for particular phenomena or events in my observations of the Psych 601 groups. In this way, I believe that I was able to collect the data with less of a predisposition to emphasize or disregard specific events. Instead, I worked hard to capture as much as possible of the group experience within the detail of my field notes.

I planned to use the field research to obtain a detailed description of the social interaction in the Psych 601 groups. By observing the groups from start to finish, I hoped that a vivid picture of the attack and pain-related behaviors of group members would emerge — illustrating the ways in which members attacked one another, the strategies for inflicting, experiencing, and avoiding pain, and the purpose the attack served for the group. Collecting data from multiple groups, I would be able to look at overall patterns in group interaction, such as the place of attack in the group’s developmental process, the various types of attack behaviors used, commonalities in who was attacked and why, and what kinds of issues became focal points for group attack.

Collecting the Data

For my dissertation research, I observed a total of six different intensive, four-day small group experiences as part of conferences on “Group Processes” taught over a two-year period of time. The small groups observed are identified in this dissertation as Groups A through F:

- **Group A** (1994).................................12 members (six women, six men)
- **Group B** (1994).................................12 members (eight women, four men)
- **Group C** (1994).................................15 members (eight women, seven men)
- **Group D** (1995).................................12 members (eight women, four men)
- **Group E** (1995).................................13 members (eight women, five men)
- **Group F** (1995).................................17 members (12 women, five men)
Students in the groups came predominantly from the Graduate School of Education and the Graduate Business School. The groups were generally racially diverse, composed of students from different racial and ethnic groups; group members were predominantly from the United States, with a small number from other countries (including Brazil, Germany, India, Israel, Japan, Korea, and Norway). Two of the groups (B and F) included members who self-identified as sexual minorities (lesbian, gay, or bisexual); all groups included members who identified as Christian and Jewish, with several groups including members from other religions. Three of the groups observed (C, E, and F) had male Consultants; the other three (A, B, and D) had female Consultants. The Consultant for Group D was an African-American female; the Consultants for all other groups were white Americans. In addition, three of the groups (C, D, and E) also involved the participation of Co-Consultants (all female).

As described in Chapter One, the conference has a standard, formal, accepted role for the Observer. Typically, within a given conference, there are several Small Groups running simultaneously. Each Small Group has a Consultant, and possibly a Co-Consultant. In addition, the conference Director may assign one or more Observers to a given group. The assignments are made somewhat randomly, depending on the expressed research interests of the Observers, the needs and desires of the Consultants, and the total number of staff and of groups. Once assigned, the Observers for a given group stay with that Small Group (and that Consultant) throughout the entire conference. They observe only that Small Group and are present during all its sessions. Each Small Group session lasts 50 minutes, followed by a 20-30 minute break. Observers enter with the Consultant at each session’s start time, and depart with the Consultant at the scheduled time for the session’s conclusion, thus being a part of the process of
maintaining the conference’s overall time boundaries (see Appendix 2 — Conference Schedule).

As an Observer, I collected data while observing Groups A through F. In all cases, I was present in the room throughout every Small Group session. With five of the six groups, there were also other Observers present; with Group F, I was the only Observer.

There were 12-18 members in each Small Group. The sessions took place in seminar-size classrooms; chairs were arranged in an open circle (no tables or desks in the middle) with one chair for each member and a chair for the Consultant (and Co-Consultant, if present). Observers do not sit in the circle with the members at any time. Instead, I spent each Small Group session in the same room as the group members themselves, sitting behind a table in a far corner of the room. In this way, the Observer is clearly delineated as separate from the group membership; the table provides both a surface for writing, as well as a physical separation from the activity of the group.

In my role as Observer at each of the six conferences, I would watch from the corner, taking extensive, detailed notes on the interaction during the session. These notes comprise verbal transcription, behavioral observations, and insights into affect and theme. In all, my field notes comprise more than 175 typed, single-spaced pages of text, recording as comprehensively as possible my observations from the various groups.

During “breaks” between Small Group sessions, I worked with the rest of the staff (Consultants, Co-Consultants, other Observers, and the Conference Director) on analyzing and interpreting group process issues as they pertain to several levels of the conference: within each Small Group, among all the Small Groups, and within the staff group. This working time supplemented my detailed notes from each group session. The
Observers sat with the Consultant (and Co-Consultant, if one was involved) and discussed observations and insights about the overall group dynamics. This was a chance for all of us to check our perceptions of what was happening — and to get support for particular impressions or disconfirmatory data to support alternative images. In this way, it was possible to examine ethnographic observation assessments in the light of the perceptions of others studying the very same phenomena. In addition, at the conclusion of each day, I worked to write up notes based on the day’s events (Erickson, 1986a). This supplementary time was crucial in assessing the impressions and perceptions of what was going on in the small groups.

Subsequently, I was a Co-Consultant during three later conferences:

- **Group J** (1996)
- **Group K** (1996)
- **Group L** (1997)

As with Groups A through F, I was involved in only one Small Group during each of these three subsequent conferences. While I was not an active Observer — and, therefore, not taking detailed field notes — each of these three conferences provided additional data and insight into the overall Small Group experience. Throughout the conference’s working “breaks,” I wrote about particular aspects of group behavior, maintained *thematic notes* (see below) based on discussions at staff meetings, and at the end of each day prepared detailed summaries of the group’s actions throughout the day.

To supplement the experience in the Psych 601 program, in 1998 I took part in a five-day, residential Tavistock conference sponsored by the Center for the Study of Groups and Social Systems, the Boston affiliate of the A. K. Rice Institute, in Holyoke, Massachusetts.
In January of 2001, I took on the role of Consultant for a Small Group during that semester’s Psych 601.

- **Group M** (2001)

During Group M, I was the solo Consultant for the Small Group (i.e., I had no Co-Consultant working with me); there were, however, two Observers present during all Small Group sessions and they met with me regularly between sessions. As I had done in earlier years as a Co-Consultant, I wrote down behavioral descriptions and thematic notes during all staff working sessions, in addition to detailed end-of-day group behavior summaries.

Thus, these experiences as a Co-Consultant, participant (once again), and ultimately Consultant have added to and built on my foundation of learning about Group Dynamics training. For this dissertation, the detailed research data comes exclusively from the observations of Groups A through F — in my role as an Observer of the Psych 601 groups. I was not a member of the small groups being observed; in other words, data collection was based solely on observation — and not on participant observation. The supplementary experiences as Co-Consultant or Consultant in Groups J through M enhanced my awareness of the group dynamics issues, but were not a part of the dissertation’s formal data collection process. Instead, these supplementary experiences helped me to immerse myself in the course and the methodology and become more familiar with the overall framework and worldview of the Psych 601 experience.

The field worker who has observed closely in this social world has had, in a profound sense, to live there. He has been sufficiently immersed in this world to know it, and at the same time has retained enough detachment to think theoretically about what he has seen and lived through. His informed detachment has allowed him to benefit both as a sociologist and as a human being who must “make out” in that world (Glaser & Strauss, 1967: 226).
I believe that my approach involving multiple roles within the same basic structure over a number of years greatly enhances my ability to interpret and make sense of the data collected. Because I have viewed the experience from virtually every “seat” in the room, I feel more qualified as a researcher to describe, analyze, and discuss the group dynamics from a more multi-faceted perspective.

**Grounded Theory**

Observation has throughout history been a way for people to gather data about the world around them – “the bedrock source of human knowledge” (Adler & Adler, 1994: 377). And while Lofland (1971) and others have noted that the role of the observer/researcher can vary greatly, observation as a method of data collection remains a foundation of much social science research (Denzin, 1994).

Employing qualitative research methods such as making use of field notes (as in this research) can generate non-standard data which can make analysis difficult or problematic. Grounded theory’s methodology, however, can assist in handling problems or difficulties. Initially articulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and enhanced by Glaser (1978), Corbin and Strauss (1990), and Strauss and Corbin (1994), grounded theory represents a general methodology for the development of theory that is grounded in data which is systematically collected and analyzed. Grounded theorists begin by conceptualizing a set of experiences they wish to explore, starting out with broad research questions rather than narrowly conceptualized or fixed hypotheses determined in advance.

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42 Unlike the research in this dissertation, most group research has not used observation of naturalistic groups; instead, the vast majority of studies cited in Moreland et al’s (1994) exhaustive review of research on small groups “reported data from laboratory experiments” (Arrow, McGrath, & Berdahl, 2000: 266). Arrow and her colleagues also cite Sanna and Parks’ (1997) overview of studies in organizational psychology, where lab experiments were still the most popular research strategy.
The intent is to develop an account of a phenomenon that identifies the major constructs, or categories in grounded theory terms, their relationships, and the context and process, thus providing a theory of the phenomenon that is much more than a descriptive account (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). The theory or theories themselves evolve during the research, and they do so through the ongoing relationship between data collection, analysis, and reporting. Kathy Charmaz’s (1993) work stresses the way in which grounded theorists generate theory from data.

By starting with data from the lived experience of the research participants, the researcher can, from the beginning attend to how they construct their worlds. That lived experience shapes the researcher’s approach to data collection and analysis. In comparison, more traditional logical-deductive approaches explicitly derive hypotheses from pre-existing theories, which fundamentally structure both the data collection and analysis toward verification of refutation of these hypotheses (1993: 38).

Indeed, Charmaz views grounded theory from a social constructionist viewpoint which assumes an active observer whose decisions very much shape the process and outcome (Charmaz, 1990: 1165).

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973, 1988) believed that fieldwork was about creating an account of another society by entering the sequence of events and producing an interpretation that can be used to explain the events to another audience. The term “ethnography,” in fact, derives from the inscription of social action — of writing it down. From an ethnographic standpoint, we are actually interpreting people’s actions — the actions which are themselves based on an ongoing process of interpreting and reinterpreting others’ actions. The ethnographic fieldworker and analyst thus ends up contributing yet another layer of meaning. Geertz writes that “what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their
compatriots are up to” (Geertz, 1973: 9). Or, as Peter Jackson refers to it, this can be seen as a “double hermeneutic, involving the interpretation of an interpretation” (1989: 172). The research for this dissertation was not about observing or explaining a “society” or completing an ethnography. But, we can borrow from Geertz’s and Jackson’s ideas to see that the observations and analysis of the “Group Processes” groups constitute an interpretation of the actions of others in the field – and from these interpretations as researcher, I have built conceptual categories to make sense of the social interactions, examining how groups have managed the pain and danger of group life.

This research and interpretation is an essential element of the sense-making process. For, as a researcher, I am looking at behaviors and processes that are sometimes outside conscious thought or individual planning. In other words, simply asking the group members how they handle the attacks and pain of group interaction yields data that is quite different from detailed observations of the actual behaviors and strategies as they emerge. Rather than relying on the self-reports or self-descriptions of the participants, the field researcher is able to observe behavior patterns, identify commonalities across individuals or groups, and develop conceptual categories to help explain the role or function of particular attack-related behaviors in group life.

**Applying Grounded Theory to the Research**

In this research, I made use of a grounded theory approach to analyze and make sense of the data collected from group process observations and experiences. I collected an extensive body of detailed fieldnotes from the six conferences of Psych 601 I observed (Groups A through F) – and was able to supplement my understanding of this data with insights and awareness developed during my later experiences as a Co-Consultant.
(Groups J through L), as an enrolled participant (not an Observer or member of the staff) in the A. K. Rice Institute's Tavistock conference, and finally as a Consultant (Group M).

A research approach using grounded theory makes more visible the details of group process work — and facets of everyday life. While virtually all people know intuitively (or try to, at the very least) how groups work (after all, much time is spent in groups), it is rare to examine them explicitly and consciously.

“What is happening here?” may seem a trivial question at first glance. It is not trivial since everyday life is largely invisible to us (because of its familiarity and because of its contradictions, which people may not want to face). We do not realize the patterns in our actions as we perform them. The anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn illustrated this point with an aphorism: “The fish would be the last creature to discover water.”

Fieldwork research ..., through its inherent reflectiveness, helps researchers ... to make the familiar strange and interesting again. The commonplace becomes problematic. What is happening can become visible, and it can be documented systematically. (Erickson, 1986a: 121.

This research and the methodology used to make sense of the data helps us discover the local meanings of events and behaviors — by examining it in the moment in which it is occurring. There is a clear interactional structure of which group life is a major part. In that way, Durkheim (1938) was quite right: society (or the group) is a reality unto itself and the group’s participants constantly take account of the social facts and particulars in their moment of occurrence.

Working from a qualitative research perspective within a grounded theory framework, I spent a great deal of time reviewing and re-reviewing the data. With each subsequent review, distinct conceptual categories emerged around specific topics. For example, when I noted a particular type of incident or behavior in one group, I initially sought all information within that group life pertaining to the incident (c.f., Jehn, 1997;
Nicotera, 1993). Based on that data, I might develop the start of an hypothesis about how or why something occurred. I would then review the data for all of the other groups to look for confirming and disconfirming behaviors or information. In this way, I was able to create categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990) – or broad conceptions of ways to organize the information – and work toward saturating the categories to support a particular observation or hypothesis. When I identified disconfirming evidence, I would begin a possible new category or use it to reconstruct an already existing category. Thus, I began to identify major thematic points about the nature and experience of pain and danger in group life.

Those categories that emerged – and make up the remaining chapters of this dissertation – reflect the application of this qualitative research approach to the data derived from the observations and experience of Psych 601. As qualitative data, they can help us understand the how’s and why’s of particular facets of group behavior – shedding light on some of the interactional processes and social dynamics of face-to-face interaction. As Adler & Adler (1994) quote Brissett and Edgley’s (1990) eloquent description of Goffman’s (1959, 1967, 1969) perspective and the interactional process overall:

The theater of performances is not in people’s heads, it is in their public acts. People encounter each other’s minds only by interacting, and the quality and the character of these interactions come to constitute the consequential reality of everyday life (Brissett & Edgley, 1990: 37; in Adler & Adler, 1994: 383).

The challenge for the qualitative researcher, then, is to make every effort to grasp that reality through the study of interaction and public behavior.
The Researcher in the Room

The methodology of note-taking

As described above, my research question evolved throughout the data collection process. This meant that I was less concerned about a narrowly-tailored issue and instead was able to concentrate on compiling overall detailed and descriptive notes about the various aspects of Psych 601, particularly as they pertained to notions of pain and danger in group life.

While sitting in the room with the members of the Small Group, I took detailed notes about the group’s interaction: dialogue, movement, seating patterns, and behaviors. All in all, there were five distinct categories within my field notes (c.f., Miles & Huberman, 1994); taken together, these five categories represent the in-the-moment organizational system of the field data:

1. Utterance outlines
2. Direct quotes
3. Behavioral descriptions
4. Situational observations
5. Thematic notes

Utterance outlines. Typically, I focused on the overall “gist” of what a particular speaker was saying. I wrote the notes as a form of shorthand “script,” identifying each speaker and then an outline of what they said. The focus was not usually on speaker’s verbatim utterance or a direct quote. Instead, I wrote down a shorthand version of what they said — making sure to retain key words and concepts. Typically, the utterances were written as first-person paraphrasing of the member’s speech; on some occasions, however, the utterance outlines are drafted in the third person (e.g., “She talked about how frustrated she was with Jason’s behavior.”).
Direct quotes. In some cases, however, I did note the verbatim utterance. These were usually instances when it seemed that the particular language and syntax of the speaker was potentially significant or important. In those cases, I indicated the utterance by enclosing the text in quotation marks in my notes.

Behavioral descriptions provided information about what the group or individual members were doing at a particular moment in time. These focused primarily on group behaviors, such as seating arrangements, food-sharing, door-closing or opening, movement, tears, laughter, and observations about clothing or accessories. In some cases, the behavioral descriptions summarized a kind of interaction, rather than providing a more “blow-by-blow” account of a verbal exchange.

Situational observations. These constituted my “sense” of what the group was experiencing at a given moment – and were typically recorded in brackets in the margins of the notes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It was my way of noting a particular group affect, or questioning why things were unfolding in a certain way. The situational observations are related to Altheide and Johnson’s (1994) notion of tacit knowledge, those “ineffable truths, unutterable partly because they are between meanings and actions, the glue that joins human intentionality to more concretely focused symbols of practice” (1994: 491). In addition, the situational observations provided an outlet for me as the researcher to express my own subjectivity about the group process taking place – Clandinin and Connelly’s concept of “inward” focus (1994: 417). Thus, I might use the situational observations to express my frustration with a particular member or group dynamic, or to note my own emotional state or reactions at a specific moment.

Thematic notes. During the “breaks” between Small Group sessions and at the close of each day’s activities, conference staff would meet and discuss individual group
dynamics and overall conference themes. During these conversations, we would be able to compare impressions about group-level behaviors, check the accuracy of data, and share insights into the processes at work. I would write down the issues addressed during these conversations and these formed the core of the thematic notes from my field observations.

The example below (from the field notes from C1-4) illustrates the use of the first four categories of notes: utterance outlines, direct quotes, behavioral descriptions, and situational observations.43

Jan: Shares idea that she stereotypes Jews as smart. Now I’m really uncomfortable.
Lana: I think that’s cool; shows courage.
Oliver: He wears yarmulke because he has since child.
Saul: Pieter, in Norway, is there anti-Semitism?
Pieter: The head of House of Rep is Jew and was in concentration camp.
Dr. Weller: Group has found sexy topic to escape prison, but perhaps it’s building walls higher.
Clara: (angry) “Will you just explain what you mean instead of speaking obliquely!”
They then misunderstand and think he’s talking about segregating people.
Dr. Weller: “I suspect the group is too scared to answer the question about this prison.”
[Children with guns]

In the above example, the speech of Jan, Lana, Oliver, Saul, and Pieter are summarized in utterance outlines.44 The interventions of Dr. Weller (the Consultant) represent both

43 In the context of this dissertation, I use pseudonyms to refer to all the people involved in the Psych 601 group experience (members, Consultants, Director). Following the format of Taylor et al (in press), I have used first names for the group members (students) to distinguish them from the Consultants, the Director, or the Observers.

44 Note that Jan’s initial utterance is a combination of both third-person description of the content of her utterance, and a first-person paraphrase of her stated emotion. Oliver’s speech is presented in the third person in the utterance outline.
utterance outlines and direct quotes. Clara’s angry response to Dr. Weller’s first intervention is also a direct quote. The notes also make use of behavioral description following Clara’s response – giving a picture of the overall group actions as they talked about Dr. Weller’s intervention. During this conversation, I began to note that the group seemed particularly aggressive and hostile, yet without the requisite maturity to handle the “weapons” they were carrying; thus, the margin note made the situational observation that to me they were like “children with guns.”

In describing the group’s interactions in the text of this dissertation, I have attempted to summarize the dialogue, giving accounts of members’ statements accompanied by descriptions of individual and group behavior and overall group dynamics (c.f., Wolcott, 1990). This is a fairly standard practice in descriptions of group dynamics interactions (e.g., Dunphy, 1985; Elrick, 1977; Kuriloff, et al., 1984; Smith & Gergen, 1995; Wells, 1985; Yalom & Lieberman, 1972) The detailed accounts, then, comprise the various “cases” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) that support the grounded theory propositions put forth. This process of making sense of what has been learned is “the art of interpretation,” finding the path that will help the researcher move “from the field to the text to the reader” (Denzin, 1994: 500).

My goal in this process has been to help the reader picture as clearly as possible the situation of the group members – to draw the reader into “the subjects’ worlds” (Adler & Adler, 1994: 381). As Denzin paraphrasing Geertz writes, “a good interpretation takes us into the center of the experiences being described” (1994: 502).

Subjectivity & parallel process

In virtually all research, particularly that which is qualitative in nature, the researcher must confront the issues of objectivity and subjectivity. And, within the
context of this particular research, these issues are quite prominent. My role as an Observer within the Small Group setting put me both inside and outside the group. While I diligently maintained the boundaries of the conference (marking time boundaries along with the Consultants and not engaging with group members during or between Small Group sessions), I was simultaneously engaged with the group’s struggle to “survive” and to learn from the process. I would not be human if I did not have emotional reactions to particular group members, likes and dislikes, and conflicting and sometimes concurrent sensations of fear and hope and expectancy for the group as a whole.

This means, however, that as researcher I needed to be continuously aware of the subjectivity inherent in the data collection process – participating by “situating” myself in the note-taking and the ultimate report (Frey, 1998). Just as the course itself asks the group members to pay attention to their emotions and their impact on their actions, so I needed to attend continuously to my own biases and subjectivity as an Observer (c.f., Berg & Smith, 1988; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Steier, 1991; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). While enacting Geertz’s (1973) notion of “thick description,” we are actually working from a preconfigured set of social, intellectual, and organizational biases. Thus, the fieldworker taking notes comes face-to-face with the very powerful reality of “transcription as theory” (Ochs, 1979). In other words, what we see (or choose to see), what we note (or choose to write down) are an integral part of our overall conceptual framework – part of the theory which is guiding the research from the outset. Clandinin and Connelly talk about the awareness of the very act of telling the group story that “come[s] down to matters of autobiographical presence and the significance of this presence for the text and for the field” (1994: 418). Thus, this awareness is an essential
element of both the data collection and data analysis process. As Arnst frames his
description of participant observation:

Quite the opposite of neutrality and detachment, investigation is immersed
in the natural setting in order to obtain, in so far as possible, an inside
view of the social context. The goal is empathetic — a search for
subjective understanding, rather than a manipulative quest for prediction

Alongside the immersion in the social setting of the Small Group as its Observer,
I was also simultaneously a member of another group within the conference: the staff
group. In the context of group dynamics training and research, staff pay a great deal of
attention to an element known as parallel process: “those dynamics within and between
the … groups that mirrored what was going on” in the conference as a whole (Smith &
Zane, 1999: 146). In other words, parallel process is the way in which the internal
dynamics of the Small Groups are themselves re-created or reinforced by the dynamics of
the staff group (c.f., DeLucia, Bowman, & Bowman, 1989; Smith, Simmons, & Thames,
1989). In each and every conference, the staff in various configurations (Consultants and
Director alone, Consultants with their specific Observers, and all Consultants, Observers,
and the Director together) took time to examine their own behavior within the staff group
— and discuss the ways in which it was connected to the dynamics within and between the
Small Groups in the conference. The nature of parallel process, and my dual roles as
Observer-Researcher and simultaneously a member of the staff group meant that I, like
all other members of the staff, was emotionally engaged in the group process. A diligent
awareness of this process and of my reactions was essential to continued effectiveness as
a researcher.
Ethical Responsibility

A final element of the research methodology inherent in this dissertation was an ongoing awareness of my ethical responsibilities as an observer and researcher (Adler & Adler, 1994). Because the conference has a built-in mechanism for the role of the Observer, it was not necessary to obtain any kind of informed consent for my research. All members are told prior to registering for the course that there will likely be Observers during the Small Group session and that these Observers are students in an advanced course writing papers about group dynamics. To de-mystify the process of observation and research, all Observers introduce themselves shortly after the Consultant self-introductions during the Introductory session on Day 1 of the conference. In my introduction at each conference, I informed all participants that I was a doctoral student engaged in research for my dissertation, looking at group dynamics and behavioral patterns in small groups.

As described in Chapter One, Small Group members are instructed to maintain confidentiality; they may say anything they like about their own experience in the conference, or anything they like about the Consultants. However, they are not to mention the names or describe the behaviors of any member of their Small Group outside the membership of the Small Group. The conference staff take this ground rule very seriously and it applies equally well to both staff and membership in the conference.

Thus, my note-taking — and the very notes themselves — can become issues pertaining to the confidentiality of the Small Group experience. As an Observer, I made sure that my notebooks were always with me during the conferences. In this way, I was both working to maintain the conference's confidentiality and simultaneously modeling a rigorous attention to this central precept (Corey, 1990; George & Dustin, 1988, Luke &
Benne, 1975). Finally, as Clandinin and Connelly write, “anonymity and other ways of fictionalizing research texts are important ethical concerns” (1994: 422). Thus, in this dissertation, all names and other unique, personal details which could help identify an individual participant have been changed. In this way, I protect the identity of those who participated in the various groups observed, and live up to both the conference’s central precept of confidentiality and my ethical obligations as a researcher.
Chapter 4: Group Attack and Metaphor

VOICE: (Offstage) I am your neighbor in house of McBains. Please, will you let me come in? (SIDNEY turns, wide-eyed. MYRA too is startled and frightened). Is most urgent I speak to you. I call the information but the lady will tell me not your number. Please, will you let me come in? (SIDNEY turns to the door) I am friend of Paul Wyman. Is most urgent!

SIDNEY: (Opening the door) Come in.

(HELG A TEN DOR P comes into the foyer, a stocky strong-jawed Teutonic woman in her early fifties, in the throes of considerable distress. She wears slacks and a hastily seized and unfastened jacket)

HELG A: I apologize for so late I come, but you will forgive me when I make the explaining. (She comes into the study. SIDNEY closes the door) Ja, ja, is room I see. Beams, and window like so . . . (Holds her forehead, wincing) And the pain! Such pain! (Sees MYRA and recognizes her as the source of it; approaches her) Pain. Pain. Pain. Pain. (Moves her hand about MYRA, as if wanting to touch and comfort her but unable to) Pain. Pain. Pain!

-Ira Levin, Deathtrap: A Thriller In Two Acts. (1979)

The Pain of Being Attacked

In the life of the Psych 601 self-study groups, people experienced externally-driven pain – as a result of being attacked by members of the group.45 This dissertation

45 In addition, it is possible to consider a pain that is more internally-driven, a pain experienced, for example, when people’s own actions cause them to feel pain about the suffering they have caused others. Rice, for example, describes a Tavistock group participant saying “I can’t understand how we could be so heartless. I’m shocked by our cruelty to ___ and we still sit here doing nothing. I feel terrible about it and I’m doing nothing. I can’t avoid the responsibility, but I can’t carry it either”
focuses on the pain experienced as a result of attack-driven interaction – a phenomenon that has received selected attention in the research literature. Stokes (1994), for example, writes that in groups “the underlying anxieties are about psychological survival” (1994: 22). Whitaker describes it more bluntly as the “fear of being ridiculed” (1989: 226). In Stein’s (2000) view, many of the systems groups create are designed, in particular, to protect against anxiety and, consequently, pain. To avoid this pain, self-study groups end up engaging in sometimes harsh behaviors that in the end, he says, leave some members on the sidelines in pain. These self-protective sensations are present from the group’s very beginning.

Whether stemming from group members’ valency or heightened sensitivity to their own aggressive feelings or from their reaction to the real (subtle or obvious) verbal and nonverbal cues from others, group members begin a group with a range of feelings related to aggression – arising from the degree of threat they perceive to their own safety and security, and from their perceptions of the support they imagine they can expect from others in times of stress (Kraus, 1997: 134).

Glidewell, too, sees this as part of the group’s beginning, arguing that group members behave cautiously because “each anticipates some impending pain” (1975: 147). It is this anticipation that may become manifest in the group’s actions prior to any attacking or subsequent attack-driving pain. This chapter examines attack behaviors in group life, and looks specifically at the use of metaphors in group life, metaphors that may provide a clue about the attacks that will come.

(1975: 116). And another group member said “The painful thing that I have learned about myself is my willingness to sacrifice others” (Rice, 1975: 117).
Chapter 4

Group Attack

To understand the way in which externally-derived, attack-driven pain was inflicted and experienced by the Psych 601 groups, it is important to understand a phenomenon I have called group attack: those episodes in which multiple group members attack a single member. In other words, several members of the group “gang up” and attack an individual member of the group. The group attack focused on an individual member is part of an unspoken and often perhaps unrealized dynamic. As opposed to the phenomenon of some group members pitted against a substantial number of other group members, the targeting of a single individual suggests a possible consolidation or unifying function for group attack.46

The group attack is not physically violent; it is, however, clearly an attack. In a group attack, members typically criticize, ridicule, or otherwise let members know that their speech, attitude, behavior, or even presence is less than desirable. In some cases, the attack comes in the guise of “honesty” (e.g., “Let’s all share our feelings about what is going on in the group”) or, in other cases, in the guise of “feedback” (e.g., “We just want to explain why your ideas are not as well received as you might like.”). The result, however, is the same: three or more group members work together to attack a particular individual in the group.

It is important to distinguish group attack from one-on-one conflict in the Psych 601 group setting. There are instances of one group member arguing with or in some kind of conflict with another member. When it was simply interpersonal conflict,

46 A split or schism within the group (if subgroups were to engage in hostilities with one another) is much more dangerous to overall group survival than the group attack phenomenon of many against one. There was no evidence of schism phenomena within the Psych 601 observation data, but this is a possible manifestation of conflict in group life, and one that involves multiple group members simultaneously.
however, few other group members were involved and, in the Psych 601 groups observed, the group did not allow the conflict to continue. Two individuals may argue briefly, until members of the group act to end the fight by changing the topic or stepping in to resolve the conflict (e.g., making the arguing parties see that they are basically in agreement over the central issue, or defusing the fight by making light of the topic).47

*Group attack*, on the other hand, involves at least three or more members of the group against one individual, and either an event of great intensity (e.g., raised voices, hurled accusations) or significant duration (e.g., on-going hostility, “sniping,” or persistent “feedback” focused on a particular group member, characterized by a consistent, continuous pattern).48 Thus, arguments between two individuals are distinct from the group-level involvement, intensity, or duration of *group attack*.

Another characteristic that distinguishes *group attack* is the way in which the other, more “passive” group members act — or, more accurately, the way they sometimes do not act. An episode can be characterized as *group attack* because it indeed involves the entire group. While it is true that not all group members are active participants in attacking the target individual, the others are complicit in that they do nothing to stop the attack (Alford, 1995b; Horwitz, 1995; Mayerson, 2000). If one or two group members speak up forcefully in defense of the targeted individual and the attack behavior stops, the behavior is not a *group attack* because the entire group was not implicated in the activity (Horwitz, 1985). When, however, multiple members target a particular individual and

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47 It is possible for the group to allow the fight behavior to continue, essentially setting up a situation with two “gladiators” (cf., Taylor et al, in press). In the data for this research, however, that kind of on-going, one-on-one fight did not occur.

48 In the context of the data from the observations of Psych 601, I have defined “continuous” to mean at least one attack-related statement at least every other session. With this level of frequency, the group members demonstrate a sustained, on-going pattern of attack concentrating on a particular individual.
the rest of the group remains relatively passive, "the group's failure to deal with it" (Horwitz, 1985: 29) indicates that they have accepted the course of action; the group's behavior is indeed complicit and focused and can be characterized as group attack.

In the literature on group processes, there is some discussion of aspects of the characteristics of group attack. When the process is discussed, however, it is often described as scapegoating. While there is a relationship between the concepts of group attack and scapegoating, it is important to distinguish between the two. Scapegoating is indeed one of the forms of group attack; it is not, however, the only way in which group attack is manifested in small groups. At different points in the theoretical literature about attack behavior, these various forms are sometimes referred to as scapegoating, even though they represent distinctly different motivations and perspectives. It is, however, misleading to label all episodes of group attack as scapegoating events.

Working with the field data from my research, I have identified three distinct (and, sometimes, concurrent or overlapping) perspectives that drive the selection of targets in group attack episodes:

1. **Projection** of unwanted feelings onto one particular group member who the group then attacks as a way of denying their ownership of those same feelings. This is what happens in a scapegoating process.

2. **Displacement** of aggression against the Consultant on to another group member.

3. **Discarding** members in leadership positions which at one time served a particular function after the group no longer needs or desires those roles or functions.

Responding to any of these distinct motivations, groups will mount an attack on a particular individual. And the goal of the group attack is to alter the behavior of, silence, or ostracize the targeted individual.
Projection, the first of these perspectives on target selection in group attack, is the one that is most like what is referred to as scapegoating in the literature. This motivation has received the most attention and discussion, both in theory and in practice. Throughout history, scapegoating has been seen as a way for groups to find escape from evil (Girard, 1986). The term is believed to be of biblical derivation, from the ritual of symbolically loading a goat with the accumulated wickedness of the group and exiling or destroying it in order to placate a fallen angel or demonic being known as Azazel (Carmichael, 2000; Oehler & Perault, 1986). As a part of this procedure, another goat (the "good" one) was set aside as an offering to God (Gadlin, 1991; Wright, Hoffman, & Gore, 1988).

Vogel and Bell (1968), for example, write that "the phenomenon of scapegoating is as old as human society," and that the process is one where evil influences are loaded upon a corporal entity which removes them from the group – helping effect a complete clearance of whatever evil had afflicted the group (1968: 90). This, then, is the historic context for René Girard's description of scapegoat rituals as those "where you literally load the dirt onto the victim and then you cast it out" (Girard & Miller, 1996). And in both The Scapegoat (1986) and Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World (1987), Girard makes the powerful argument that the scapegoat phenomenon is constant and universal in human groups.

Group dynamics theorists have posited a similar notion of scapegoating and, consequently, a similar process of target selection in group attack. Kraus (1997) discusses the difficulty of managing painful feelings and says that "group members experience an ambivalence around the acceptance of their own persecutory capacity of their own power for good and evil and of their own fear of possessing a power for
aggression” (1997: 136). Thus, Gabriel (1998) writes, “individuals may collectively project bad objects onto a single member of an organization or a stigmatized social group, while introjecting the idealized qualities of a good object” (1998: 303). Levine and Moreland (1990) write that “group members are often unable to integrate their positive and negative qualities into coherent and/or acceptable self-images. To resolve these internal conflicts, they project their negative qualities onto a scapegoat” (1990: 602). Gemmill refers to the notion of the “group shadow” as a way of describing the process of scapegoating, and writes that “the group shadow functions as a repository for polarities that are unacceptable to group members” (1986: 231). Hirschhorn and Young (1991) look at the process in organizational contexts and write

When people feel vulnerable, inadequate, guilty, or inferior, they project these feelings onto some outsider. ... The scapegoat then becomes the repository of feelings that cause pain, and then others deny that these feelings are indeed painful 1991: 224-225).

Oehler and Perault (1986) summarize a number of descriptions of scapegoating in the group psychotherapy literature by saying that “the pent-up, punitive feelings may be displaced onto a safer, or more easily identified target. ... In summary, the person or group who scapegoats harbors an excessive store of unacceptable feelings and thoughts, and displaces and projects these feelings onto the scapegoat” (1986: 75-76). Wright, Hoffman, and Gore (1988) provide a wide-ranging discussion of the scapegoating process in groups, and similarly write that “scapegoats contain, express, and thus, represent the warded off feelings shared by any or all of the other group members” (1988: 42). And Smith and Berg (1995) describe the process as follows:

Scapegoating is the process whereby group members disown aspects of their emotional experience ... by projecting these aspects onto others and ignoring these same aspects in themselves. Whatever angry, guilty,
shameful, hateful, or embarrassed reactions members have to their experiences in the group get transferred to one member, the scapegoat, thereby protecting the rest of the group from these upsetting and unwanted reactions. The scapegoat conversely experiences more than his or her share of these unwanted feelings welling up internally and thus acts as a lightning rod for others’ disowned feelings. When this scapegoating occurs, the group acts as if this one member is the only one having these embarrassing, hateful, ignorant, scared reactions (1995: 409).

As a result of loading the scapegoat with all of the unpleasant or unwanted feelings, Malcus (1995) says that “peers may then attack and perhaps even extrude their scapegoat from the group for that which is intolerable in … themselves” (1995: 61). Horwitz (1985), talking about the dynamics of therapy groups, writes that “those members who become the carriers of unwanted affects, the spokesmen for desired but threatening impulses, are particularly prone to end up as victims of the group’s active effort to repress and reject such ideas and feelings. Those patients are often castigated, ridiculed, and even sometimes extruded from the group” (1985: 30).

Hirschhorn and Young (1991), Smith and Berg (1995), and other theorists choose to use the verb “to project” to explain the mechanism. For the more psychoanalytically-inclined researchers, the scapegoating is part and parcel of the process known as “projective identification.” This means that the group’s projections do not just affect those doing the projecting; they also have an impact on the behavior of the recipient of the projections.

A frequent occurrence between two or more persons is the projection of certain mental contents from one person onto and into another with a resulting alteration in the behavior of the targeted person. The mechanism of projection alone is not sufficient to explain the event, since it describes only the process occurring within the projector and does not deal with the effect on the target person. That complex of processes has been termed projective identification (Horwitz, 1985: 21).
Within this framework, projective identification becomes the important psychoanalytic mechanism to explain the scapegoating process. Thus, Halton (1994) writes that “it is ... through the mechanism of projective identification that one group on behalf of another group, or one member of a group on behalf of the other members, can come to serve as a kind of ‘sponge’ for all the anger or all the depression or all the guilt in the ... group” (1994: 16). Malcus (1995) also works with the same conceptual structure, writing that “scapegoating and the more general phenomenon of role suction (Redl, 1963) are usually explained in terms of a direct route, involving projective identification” (1995: 56). He goes on to say that “role suction can be extremely powerful and is magnified through PI [projective identification], whereby the suctioned individual becomes the repository for the often disowned projected material of others” (Malcus, 1995: 60). Projective identification is clearly linked to the intellectual lineage of Melanie Klein’s (1952) concept of “splitting” (cf., Agazarian, 1989; Horwitz, 1985). Hartman and Gibbard’s (1985) description of group fantasy, for example, sound like classic analytic work on splitting: “Acting on this fantasy, the group members seek to establish and maintain contact with ‘good’ (nurturant and protective) aspects of the group and to suppress or deny the existence of certain ‘bad’ (abandoning and destructive) aspects of the group. The establishment of such a fantasied relationship appears to promise many positive gratifications. ... The essence of the utopian fantasy is that the good can be split off from the bad and that this separation can be maintained” (1985: 320).

Thus, the concept of scapegoating as a manifestation of group attack clearly has a significant place in the group dynamics literature. Yet, as identified above, there are at least two other ways to describe the motivations for selection of particular targets in

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50 Taylor, Smith, and Kuriloff (in press) describe a compelling example of the manifestations and implications of projective identification in the context of a group “casualty.”
episodes of group attack. Both of these receive less attention in the literature, yet both are present. And, both play a role in the group data from Psych 601 that comprises this dissertation research.

The second perspective on group attack is one I have referred to as displacement. This is when the group members are unable to express their anger at the authority (the Consultant) and, consequently, shift the target of their rage to another member of the group. In this way, the group can more safely vent its anger with the authority figure at someone in the room with less perceived power than the Consultant. Horwitz (1985), for example, talks about the phenomenon in the context of group therapy and describes it as “the displacement of a patient’s aggressive or libidinal impulses from the therapist onto another member, toward whom such feelings do not elicit the same fear of punishment or retaliation” (1985: 30). And Whitaker (1989) frames the therapist’s scrutiny of such an event by asking, “Is this a displaced attack, for example might the group really be angry at me but fear the consequences of expressing this anger directly, and therefore take the safer course of attacking someone who resembles me?” (1989: 231).

Some theorists have, somewhat confusingly, viewed this phenomenon as part and parcel of scapegoating; Oehler and Perault, for example, write that “scapegoating also has been seen as displaced aggression, not directed at the true source of difficulty but transferred onto some particular group or class” (1986: 74). It is important to recognize, however, that the motivation behind the group attack behavior can be different in these two concepts (projection versus displacement). Projection is not simply a form of displacement. Instead, rather than loading a group member with their unwanted emotions (the projection process, consonant with the Biblical and Girard-ian image of the scapegoat), displacement involves a re-direction of hostility and aggression.
Displacement and projection may indeed overlap sometimes, but rather than simply lumping them together as some writers have done, it is important to remember that these perspectives on group attack can indeed stem from different motivations.51

This assertion about acknowledging the possibility of these two distinct perspectives is also consistent with Scheidlinger's (1982) influential (cf., Gadlin, 1991; Oehler & Perault, 1986; Wright, Hoffman, & Gore, 1988) discussions of scapegoating:

Scheidlinger (1982) proposes a narrower definition of scapegoating. He suggests that displacement of hostility to group leaders or other people is not scapegoating. Further, he suggests limiting the term “scapegoating” to a group defensive maneuver in which the mechanisms of projection or projective identification are used. Therefore, he suggests that “the phenomenon of a scapegoating be viewed as occurring in ... a group defensive process where shared, unacceptable impulses or ideas are projected onto a victim with the intent of thus getting rid of them (Oehler & Perault, 1986: 76).

And, even though Oehler and Perault talk in broad terms about scapegoating in their preamble, they go on to state that they themselves prefer to use Scheidlinger's focused definition of scapegoating in their paper (1986). Gadlin (1991), too, prefers this narrower conception of the scapegoat. For the researcher attempting to make sense of the manifestations of attack-related pain and danger in group life, Scheidlinger's distinction is significant. Thus, the concept of displacement helps us understand another of the motivations of target selection in group attack.

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51 Because both projection and displacement are made manifest in group attack, they can at first glance look the same to the outside observer. It is only by paying attention to interactional details and the larger context of group behavior that it is possible to distinguish one phenomenon from the other. Examples of the kinds of contextual cues and questions include: What reasons are used to justify the attack? What are some of the behavioral and demographic characteristics of the target of the group attack? [For example, a target demographically similar to the Consultant may be more likely to be a target because of displacement rather than projection.] What specific actions or statements begin the attack? How do the group members talk about the attack – if at all – once it is underway? How do they talk about it once it has ended?
Finally, I have posited a third perspective on the targets of group attack to help in making sense of group members’ additional motives to attack one of their own: discarding no-longer-needed leaders or roles. This idea of discarding has received minimal attention in the group dynamics literature, other than occasional, brief references—usually as part of a discussion of some other phenomenon. Despite the recognition of the power of roles in group life, few theorists have identified the discarding of roles that the group no longer wants as an aspect of group attack behavior.

Numerous writers, however, have recognized a range of roles or types of roles that people can assume in the context of group interaction. Kraus (1997), for example, talks about the roles of “troublemakers” and “heroes.” Malcus (1995) gives examples of “clown” and “therapist’s little helper.” Piper (1995) talks about the “professor” and the “professional nurturer.” Dunphy (1985) describes five role types appearing in groups: “instructor, aggressor, scapegoat, seducer, idol” (1985: 307). And Redlich and Astrachan (1975) refer to:

The spiritual leader or ‘party philosopher’; the overt or latent anti-leader, who exists in all groups that produce leaders; the conformist, or yeasayer; the nonconformist, or naysayer; the victims, martyrs, and scapegoats; the jesters and buffoons” (1975: 232).

Moxnes (1999) provides one of the more elaborate and myth-driven sets of roles and terminology; he identifies what he sees as the 12 “archetypal” or “deep” roles in groups: god, devil, queen, witch, crown prince, black sheep, princess, whore, shaman, slave, hero, and clown. Thus, there is a range of different views of the kinds of roles possible in group life. Regardless of categories or theoretical orientation, however, it is clear that roles exist and are considered identifiable in groups.
In the group attack process of displacement, groups will use the skills, “predilections” (Alford, 1995a), or tendencies (Kraus, 1997) of a particular member — those that influence the kind of roles adopted — to achieve a certain purpose. Once achieved (or if they fail), the group can discard that role and, possibly, that group member as well. Rice (1975) succinctly describes this process:

As a group fails to get its consultant to occupy the more traditional roles of teacher, seminar leader, or therapist, it will redouble its efforts until in desperation it will disown him and seek other leaders. When they too fail, they too will be disowned, often brutally (1975: 102).

This perspective, then, argues that groups use members to fulfill particular roles or functions at a given moment in the group’s existence. Kahn (1995) makes a similar point: “Members anoint leaders and de-skill themselves, and pressure their leaders to meet increasingly impossible dependency needs. When leaders inevitably fail to meet members’ expectations, they become the targets of members’ anger and frustration” (1995: 494). Thus, Horwitz (1985) observes:

The group in its wisdom selects or drafts its most likely candidate to fulfill a particular function. The term “suction” graphically suggests the idea, nicely illustrated by Redl (1963), that group forces may sometimes act in powerful ways to pressure a person into a needed role. ... There is always a collusion between the person’s conflicts and character style on the one hand and the group’s dominant needs on the other. Groups quickly learn which members are best able to express anger, who can deal most comfortably with closeness and libidinal attraction, and who can experience dependency with a minimum of conflict (1985: 29).

For example, in any group (social, professional, familial) one member may act as the joker, helping keep things humorous and light-hearted; another member may be the warrior, helping the group fight off perceived threats; another may be the nurturer, perhaps providing food or comfort for group members; and yet another may be the
moralist, helping keep the group on the proverbial straight and narrow. At various points in the life of the group, any or all of these roles may be experienced as absolutely essential; consequently, the group will invest a great deal of authority in the member assuming that role and allow them to lead the group in that capacity. However, at a later point, the group will feel that they no longer need that particular function (e.g., in a time of peace, a warrior may not be required). If the leader in that role interprets the group’s desires accurately, she/he will wisely abandon the role and move with the group to its next stage; if, however, the role leader attempts to maintain the role and the attendant behaviors, the group will begin to shift into another mode – with or without that role leader. And, when necessary, the group will attack the member in that role so that the group can meet its own changing needs (cf., Wright, Hoffman, & Gore, 1988). Dugo and Beck (1984) describe the role leader who does not “get it”:

[The] leader behaves defensively and awkwardly, often becoming quite insensitive to subtle nonverbal communication in the group. He seems to be unable to tune in to it, or perhaps he tunes in to it but does not agree with it. Despite the fact that he is not communicating accurately with the group, the ... Leader usually asserts himself, trying to exert leadership and influence on the group’s process (1984: 32).

If the role leader continues to try to hold on to the role and the power that goes with it, the group will eventually reject the on-going leadership attempts and, ultimately, the role leader as well. And group attack is the mechanism for removing the persistent role leader who is no longer needed.

Thus, I have argued that there are three distinct ways to view the process and motivations of target selection in group attack – ways which have previously been combined under one oversimplifying label or rubric: projection, displacement, and discarding. At times, these motivations may overlap (e.g., when the displaced aggression
against the Consultant is also targeted at an individual who has fulfilled a certain role—such as the surrogate authority—for the group at a particular moment in time). When it is observed that one group member is being attacked or criticized by others in the group, the challenge is to examine a range of possible reasons to explain the event. Whitaker (1989), talking about the therapeutic group, describes the task of the group therapist to help the group differentiate and understand based on the group’s own data:

Which explanation is most likely to account for one person being singled out for attack can only be decided by paying close attention to context and by watching and listening for whatever else is happening at the same time. If, for example, the person under attack bears some superficial resemblance to the therapist or is being attacked for something the therapist has done (or is), it may be reasonable to assume that one is observing a displaced attack. If a patient is being attacked for doing or feeling something there is reason to believe others have felt or done, scapegoating is the more likely explanation (1989:231).

Examining the data within the framework of the overall group experience helps explain how and why group members target a particular individual for group attack. It also helps view the event not simply as an incident about the personality or features of one or two individuals, but as a phenomenon that belong, appropriately, to the group as a whole (Ettin, 1995a; Piper, 1996; Taylor et al, in press; Wells, 1980).

It is important to emphasize that the episodes of group attack represent only a limited amount of the small group interaction time. As described in detail in Chapter 1, the purpose of Psych 601 is to provide students with an overall opportunity to learn about group dynamics, using a modified Tavistock-type self-study learning program. While the group attack events are sometimes some of the most dramatic or memorable group occurrences, they should not be construed to represent the fundamental or primary experience in the course as a whole. In the context of this dissertation, however, the
focus is on these very group attack episodes; this focus can lead the reader to believe that Psych 601 is a series of hysterical events punctuated by tears, shrieking, and illness. These episodes of group attack are important and often seminal events in the life of the group, but they are not the only consequential moments in the group's experience and learning. They remain, however, the central, analytical focus of this dissertation, and appear to help shed light on the realities of pain and danger in group life.

Field Data Description and Notation System

Every one of the six groups observed as part of this research had at least one incident of group attack. In the context of this dissertation, I use pseudonyms to refer to all the people involved in the Psych 601 group experience (members, Consultants, Director). Following the format of Taylor et al (in press), I have used first names for the group members (students) to distinguish them from the Consultants, the Director, or the Observers. In the context of the course (and in my notes about staff group interaction), the Consultants were often referred to by their first names – and that informality on occasion set the tone for the discussion. When appropriate, I have noted that the group members used the Consultants' or Co-Consultants' first names, while still referring to them as “Dr. Smith” or “Ms. Jones” in the text in order to help distinguish between conference participants and roles.

To help the reader make sense of when things happen in the life of the various groups, I use the following three-part code to indicate in which session a particular event or utterance took place:

1. The letter represents the specific Psych 601 conference experience observed (see Chapter 3).
2. The first number represents the day of the conference (1=Thursday, 2=Friday, 
3=Saturday, 4=Sunday).
3. The second number in the notation indicates which session that day (first, 
second, etc.).

Thus, for example, C3-5 would refer to the fifth session on the third day for 
Group C. In this way, the reader can determine which group is under discussion, and on 
what day, and where in the chronology of sessions a particular event occurred. A 
complete list of all groups and participants is included in Appendix 4.

**Metaphors of Fight and Attack**

Imagine entering a classroom full of strangers on the first day of class. There are 
10-15 of you there — and you wait expectantly for the professor to begin teaching the 
course. Instead, however, the professor merely reads a one-sentence description of your 
group’s task and sits down, never having made eye contact with any members of the 
group. You, like everyone else sitting in the circle, are perplexed and bewildered by this 
behavior. So, left to your own devices, someone in the group suggests introductions or 
perhaps simply introduces themselves to the group. The go-round of introductions 
provides a familiar structure and activity – at least for a few minutes. When the 
introductions are finished, though, the group again confronts the same dilemma: What do 
we do now?

If the group behaves typically, one of you will most likely suggest topics for 
conversation. Maybe you will talk about a supermarket that opened recently in the 
neighborhood. Or, possibly someone will start a discussion about current movies. Or, 
perhaps the conversation will be about the recent crime wave and precautions people are 
taking to prevent being victimized. Perhaps one or two people that already know one
another will start to talk about a subject of common interest. Maybe someone will ask your opinion about a controversial event in the news. Or, perhaps members will ask questions of the people from more exotic locales which could lead to a conversation about travel or living overseas or cultural differences. Any one of these kinds of topics could become your group’s focus for all or part of the next hour or so. Is the choice of topic even relevant or connected to what will subsequently happen during the course of your group’s four days together? Is there meaning lurking in the seemingly innocuous discussion of supermarket openings versus violent crime, travel stories versus political scandal versus murder trial speculations?

The members of the group would almost certainly, in the moment, insist that the choice of topics is random and not necessarily indicative of group feelings or attitudes. There is, however, another way of looking at the seemingly random topics of conversation—a way that posits that they are not mere coincidence in the group dynamic (e.g., Halton, 1994). Instead, very early in the life of the group, the emotional state of the individuals in the group and, consequently, of the group as a whole, is reflected in the language used in the initial group sessions. This emotional tone formed early in the group experience “seeps out” through the choice of subject matter for conversation in the moment when the group members are experiencing particular feelings. Thus, even though the group is newly-formed, the language they use reflects a nascent collective experience. From the perspective of Lakoff and Johnson, “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (1979: 5). Thus, the conversational topics have their literal meaning and, simultaneously, they provide clues to the ways in which the group is experiencing the situation.
The idea that the unconscious emerges in unintended ways is certainly not new (cf., Deutsch & Krauss, 1965; Whatule, 2000). Scheerhorn and Geist (1997) talk about the use of metaphors in groups, writing that “every culture attempts to create a ‘universe of discourse’ for its members, a way in which people can interpret their experience and convey it to one another ... and sometimes the symbols are so significant that they reflect the broader beliefs, attitudes, and values of the entire group” (1997: 96). Halton (1994) speaks more concretely, saying:

Ideas which have a valid meaning at the conscious level may at the same time carry an unconscious hidden meaning. For example, a staff group talking about their problems with the breakdown of the switchboard may at the same time be making an unconscious reference to a breakdown in interdepartmental communication. Or complaints about the distribution of car-park spaces may also be a symbolic communication about managers who have no room for staff concerns (1994: 11-12).

And Whitaker (1989) provides other examples drawn from therapy groups. Although she discusses the phenomenon in on-going therapeutic groups (as opposed to the Tavistock-type self-study groups like Psych 601), she articulates a similar vision or approach to interpreting the language of group interaction:

Groups not infrequently construct metaphors, which contain, convey, and at the same time, mask certain shared impulses or fears. A group whose members question the competence of the architect who designed the building may well be expressing their reactive fears about the competence of the therapist in a disguised way. An inpatient group whose members complain about uncaring domestic staff may be expressing their shared fears of being rejected or not cared for by the therapist. Sometimes the first hints of shared concerns arise through the patients telling stories about events which have happened to them outside the group since the previous session. The stories are all different, yet resemble one another in the feelings being expressed. Sometimes first hints arise from the ways in which the patients comment about some current event in the news (1989: 232).
Van Buskirk and McGrath's (1999) work on organizational psychology talks about how symbols "attenuate reality" to make the corporate reality more manageable and how "language preserves sanity during corporate takeovers where panic finds uneasy containment in a language rich in metaphor (e.g., 'White Knights,' 'Raiders,' 'Poison pills,' etc.)" (1999: 807). Similarly, Srivastva and Barrett (1988) contend that metaphors are particularly valuable when groups are in anxiety-producing situations: "Indirect discussion in a more comfortable but related domain provides a safe area of inquiry when anxiety-arousing topics emerge" (1988: 37). They go on to say that "this is especially evident when members are attempting to articulate difficult, intimidating experiences. Metaphorical expressions, in a sense, camouflage powerful, direct feelings while still communicating important information in a less threatening way" (1988: 47). Thus, the metaphors themselves serve a powerful communicative function.

This process of sense-making from metaphorical communication is an important component of an understanding of overall group dynamics. Through its imagery and symbolism, we can begin to appreciate the group’s emotional responses. "By looking at group members’ ‘key expressions’ (Black, 1962) and concepts, one can trace the root metaphors and perceive how the group is constructing its reality in its own language" (Srivastva & Barrett, 1988: 47). Smith and Simmons (1983) discuss the use of metaphor in group life and give voice to the complexity of "seeing" and comprehending group affect.

Perhaps one of the most complicated tasks the social investigator can take on is to try to capture unconscious processes, because they are not directly observable. They become manifest in surface behavior. The only thing we can physically point to is the overt. The deep structure or unconscious domain remains latent. It’s conceptually analogous to noticing the wind as it blows through trees (Smith, 1982a). We only recognize the wind by its
impact on objects that move and behave in the wind’s presence. It wouldn’t make sense for us to claim that leaves ripple and trees bend simply because it’s in their nature to do so. If we want to “see” the invisible wind, we must look to the trees’ behavior. Likewise, if we want to plumb the unconscious, we must look at the manifest (1983: 390).

It is this process of looking at the manifest — the symbolic utterances and metaphoric imagery of the group’s early sessions — that helps the researcher make sense of the group dynamic. Kets de Vries (1991) writes about the interpretation of dynamics in organizational contexts, saying that “a further dimension is added if we are alert to underlying themes, meanings behind the metaphors used by managers, reasons for the selection of certain words, and implications of certain activities” (1991: 5). And Diwan and Littrell (1996) place the issue solidly within the realm of qualitative research saying that “when analyzing qualitative data, researchers often examine the emotionally laden words used by respondents to gauge the intensity of feeling about a particular issue” (1996: 95).

It is important to recognize that the emotionally-laden language and metaphors used in the group can represent the emerging emotional tone of the group as a whole — representing what the group appears to be experiencing in that particular period in the group’s life. In other words, the fact that several group members talk about a neighborhood crime spree may reflect something more than those individual members’ concerns about safety and security in the group. The fact that the subject was raised and discussed, even briefly, in the group context can indicate that the issue of safety is salient in that very moment for the group as a whole (cf., Debbane, 1995; Duncan, 1995; Ettin, 1996a, 1996b; Mayerson, 2000; Pines, 1994; Pinney, 1996; Wells, 1980, 1985).

Most theories of group development focus on the individual as the basic unit of analysis. We have become accustomed to paying attention to individual language and behavior and indications of personal autonomy.
While we pay lip service to the phenomena of the group as a unit developing, we continue to think of "group development" as a collection of individuals developing, becoming more autonomous. We propose here that metaphors can be seen as indices for the group as the basic unit of analysis. The group’s metaphorical constructions act as paradigms, a set of explicit and implicit theories: the basic assumptions, beliefs, and philosophies which the group is continually constructing for itself and which underlie the logic, the perceptions, the judgments, and the selection and sorting of data (Emphasis in original). Srivastva & Barrett, 1988: 62).

**Metaphors as clues to intensity of group attack**

One of the observations to emerge from the observation data concerns the kind and content of language and metaphor which groups employ early in group life. It appears that groups which make persistent, on-going use of violent or aggressive language and metaphors as a dominant theme in their early discussions seem to have a greater propensity for highly intense and dramatic episodes of group attack in subsequent sessions. In other words, the major thematic content of early, introductory discussions which focuses on attack or battle may serve as a predictor of the vehemence of group attack behavior during the life of the group. An examination of the language used in early sessions of group life helps to see the possible relationship between language and later actions. This is not to imply that this relationship is direct or causal; but, it does appear that there is some kind of connection between the use of attack-related metaphors and the intensity of subsequent group attack.

Two of the Psych 601 groups (B and E) had dramatic and intense episodes of group attack. And, while all of the groups observed experienced group attack, the events in these two groups were more extreme in terms of the emotions expressed and the overall group reaction to their group attack experience. All groups used some metaphorical language which gave an indication of their underlying anxieties about the group process. But, the early sessions of Groups B and E manifested the most wide-ranging and
extensive use of attack and battle-related language and metaphors among the groups observed.

In Group B (Consultant: Dr. Rosen; 12 members: eight women and four men), the group members spent their initial session introducing themselves and talking about what they had heard in advance about Psych 601 – and about group-related experiences in other settings. They talked about their academic affiliations within the university and their reasons for wanting to take the course. Like all Psych 601 groups, they were puzzled and frustrated by the Consultant’s behavior and tried to make some sense of it. They speculated on the possible motives of the Consultant – and the Observers – wondering how much of this was manipulated to trigger a particular reaction or set of behaviors. In other words, they acted like a fairly typical Tavistock-type group in its first few sessions (cf., Cytrynbaum, 1993; Ettin, 1997; Lipgar, 1993b; West & Braxton, 1993).

Looking at examples from the discussions during the first few sessions, there is a clear pattern of using language involving metaphorical and literal references to confrontation, fear, battle, attack, safety, and defense. These metaphors used prominent, recurrent conversational imagery of conflict and aggression.

Kate was “angry and pissed off” and feeling “pretty protected.”

Leah talked about fighting for things to be fair in educational systems.

Pam said that other people who had taken this course were traumatized – so she was feeling very self-protective.

Lou still hadn’t broken into the culture of the Education department, and described his interpersonal style by saying that he is a “straight shooter.”

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52 Words with the dotted underlining are those that are relevant for the examples cited and do not reflect the speaker’s emphasis.
Leah said that her style sometimes put people “on the defensive” even if she did not mean to. (B1-1)

Martin said he did not want to monopolize or overrun the conversation. (B1-1)

Roger said that he tended to just grab the task — and that sometimes other folks felt shot down by his approach. (B1-1)

Kate felt like she was always on the opposing side. (B1-1)

Ray got the session underway by asking “Who’s the Al Haig — Mr. ‘I’m in control now’ — in this group?” (B1-2)

Chrissy said that at the university she felt overwhelmed by the dominant people — and was struggling to speak. (B1-2)

Susan pointed out that men don’t ask if women are pregnant because they’ve been traumatized by prior experience.” (B1-2)

Martin talked about his rock band experience and said that in his experience groups are very volatile. (B1-2)

Susan said groups don’t scare her that much; she’s used to being a honcho — the one others expect to take charge. (B1-2)

Kate declared that the group needed to create a safe space. “Where is the safety?” she asked. (B1-2)

Lou pointed out that in business school, the students confront their professors. (B1-2)

Ray questioned the importance of safety in the group, saying that he was not afraid of the rest of the group. At the end of four days, he said, he gets “to walk out of here.” (B1-2)

Kate explained that “combativeness is a part of my self-protection.” (B1-2)

Annette said that personally she did not feel threatened. (B1-2)

Susan doesn’t like guys who come barreling in. … and she was “dying” for some structure. (B1-2)
Roger told a story of how a business group tried to “enforce” norms. And, he said, one of the other groups currently in the Psych 601 conference described themselves as very tense and about to blow. (B1-3)

Kate described herself as “in fight mode.” (B1-3)

Martin pointed out that the Consultant is not harming anybody. (B1-4)

Lou would have loved it if the Consultant came in and antagonized the group and they resisted her. (B2-1)

Leah was feeling very defensive talking about the Consultant. (B2-1)

Lou asked if the U.N. interventions to keep the peace end up leaving some people “shafted.” (B2-2)

The group played a “story game” where every member contributed a written sentence to the creation of a story on a folded paper. The story read aloud involved the fact that someone had broken the law and had to be “caned four times.” (B2-2)

Group B’s comments and discussion from its first day-and-a-half manifest the dominant imagery of their conversations. The group repeatedly used military and combative terminology and symbolism pertaining to safety, punishment, and defense throughout those initial sessions. This use of metaphor provides insight into how the group was feeling at the time – and may indeed provide a harbinger of things to come.

As Srivastva and Barrett (1988) argue, “one way of discovering the tacit awareness (Polanyi, 1959) of group members is by paying attention to the individual’s and group’s own language, specifically their creation of metaphors” (1988: 32). Thus, Group B’s “tacit awareness” may have been about the dangers inherent in their group – and their collective anxieties “leaked” this awareness through the conversational metaphors and images they selected. And while other groups also experienced anxiety about the dangers
of interaction, Group B’s use of attack-related metaphor was more extensive and elaborate than any other group observed.

Was the group indeed dangerous? The observation data seem to indicate that the group members certainly experienced it that way. In Group B, there was an episode of group attack that the group clearly experienced as dramatic and, in essence, traumatic.

Leah, a slight young woman, was the target of the group attack in Group B on the conference’s second day. And this attack ended up setting the tone for the remainder of the group’s time together.

Leah was noticeably nervous as the group started on Thursday morning. Introducing herself, she made a point of saying that she was the second cousin of an extraordinarily famous American performer. On day two (B2-2), as the group finished playing several games (including the “story” game mentioned above), Leah was singled out by several group members for talking too much. They told her that they have a tendency to “tune her out” when she talks — and indicated that her ideas are not as well received as the ideas of other members. At the end of the session, the Consultant made an intervention that the group had put one member on the “hot seat,” critiquing what she says and does.

While Dr. Rosen’s intervention may have halted the discussion about Leah’s style, it became clear when the next session began that there had already been some impact. The Consultant and Observers arrived after the break to find that all group members except Leah were present.

The session (B2-3) began very quietly. Noting Leah’s absence, the group tried to figure out her reaction and discussed whether she felt attacked. When Leah arrived a few minutes later, she was visibly upset. She quietly entered the room and took her seat. The group talked about when and how members choose to leave the room at the end of the session. Leah sat silently for less than five minutes, then ran out in tears.

Leah’s abrupt, tearful departure quickly put the group in a sort of crisis-response mode: they began to talk loudly and quickly, and almost everyone began to talk at once. Some
spoke to the group in general; others engaged in side conversations with one or two members. The basic theme was trying to figure out how to react: What do we do now? Do we go after her? Do we wait for her to come back?

After several minutes of discussion, several group members (Chrissy, Kate, Bettina, and Annette) left one-by-one to find her. Bettina re-entered the room and agitatedly exclaimed, "She's coming back! Thank God!" Leah returned with the others, and, wiping away tears, quietly indicated that she did not wish to discuss what happened.

Leah's request clearly left the group feeling uncomfortable. The group seemed confused: Lou asked Chrissy what she thought; others looked around the room for some kind of guidance. With some effort, they decided to talk about something else — and began a halting discussion about whether or not they should end sessions when the Consultant leaves. After a somewhat laborious process of deciding to end at the assigned times, Ray humorously congratulated the group on reaching consensus about something. Leah remained in her chair; during the group's conversation, she continued to cry quietly.

As the group shifted to talking about their prior experiences writing group papers, Leah began to cry more noticeably. Suddenly, she looked up and began to scream: "I cried because I felt attacked! ... Attacking someone's personality does not further the work of the group. Did comment after comment help everybody here?!! Did it make you feel better?!! Well, not me!!" She continued to sob, while attempting to tell the group that the last thing she wanted was to cry in front of everyone. The group was silent while Leah alternated between talking and crying. When she was calmer, some members talked about how they felt bad that this had happened; others said they regretted thinking only from their own perspective and not putting themselves in Leah's shoes.

Immediately following Leah's outburst, the group began to characterize the event as an attack. Ray, for example, asked Lou if he would not be upset being attacked by five people. Chrissy talked about how she felt that she should have tried to stop the attack. The group attack on Leah became a landmark event and had an impact on much of the interaction during the remainder of Group B's existence.
At the next session (B2-4), Leah was ill with stomach problems. She left the room abruptly several times during the session, assuring the group that her departures were related to “stomach trouble — not emotional issues.” At one point, it was possible to hear retching sounds outside the room. Punctuated by Leah’s departures and arrivals, the group carried on a fairly dispassionate discussion about leadership, wondering if they had any leaders in the group, what would make a good leader — interspersed with comments about what they had for lunch or making jokes about who owed money to whom. Dr. Rosen made an intervention that there seemed to be a “very in and out quality” to the session, with members alternating between topics, between being asleep and awake, between being ready to engage or not engage. Immediately after the Consultant’s intervention, Bettina wondered aloud whether everyone was “so low-energy” because they were “trying to play it safe.” Annette and Susan expressed the opinion that being quiet is boring, but at least it’s safe. Susan went on to say that the group was trying to find the optimal tension level between “nothing” and “we’re gonna kill each other.”

Leah’s symptoms never fully disappeared for the next two and a half days. During the Thematic Event of day two, for example, Leah sat with her head down on the desk. She spent part of the following session (B2-5) in the bathroom, coming in and out of the group. As day three began, Leah was still ill; rather than sit in her chair, she spent part of each session on the floor, often curled up in a fetal position at the Consultant’s feet. From time to time, she would moan softly. When the group inquired after her (as they did each time she moaned or manifested symptoms), she would indicate that she was “fine;” the group would pause, possibly check in with her further, then return to their discussion.

While Leah was certainly experiencing physical symptoms of her illness, it also seemed to the conference Director, the Consultant, and the Observers that being sick was a response to the group attack. Her symptoms allowed her to remain non-verbal yet still command significant attention. Although the possible connection between the group attack and her symptoms was never made explicit in the group, Leah’s ups and downs
punctuated much of the group discussion for many sessions. It seemed that Leah now occupied the seemingly contradictory yet simultaneous positions of both vulnerable victimhood and powerful retribution—all as an outcome of the group attack. By her actions, it appeared that Leah was able to sufficiently terrify the group with her own retaliative power—or make the group afraid of its own power\textsuperscript{53} to inflict pain—and, thus, instill in the group a sense of potential danger or threat from their capacity to attack and wound one of their own.

This appears to have been a group attack predicated on the group’s projection of their own unpleasant, fearful feelings on to Leah. Thus, she was the chosen scapegoat because she embodied the unbridled anxiety and fear that Group B could not accept within themselves. Numerous members had given voice to the notion that it is important not to show emotion, not to be afraid or feel threatened—and a number of them had declared at different points that they were “not afraid” or “not feeling threatened.” It appears that when the group could no longer tolerate experiencing its own fearfulness, they projected it all on to Leah; then they claimed that Leah talked too much (she was the “nervous, anxious, unfocused chatterbox”)—and attempted to silence her.

Thus, it is possible to observe that there may be a relationship between the preponderance of attack, defense, safety, fear, and aggression metaphors with which the group started their interaction and the concomitant perceived intensity of the subsequent group attack on day two. The group attack on Leah became illustrative of both the group’s capacity to hurt members who the group used to carry the feelings the group does not want to confront (the scapegoat)—and of the accompanying potential for retaliation. If the group could seemingly inflict this pain on one member because of her perceived

\textsuperscript{53} Some might define this power—and power in general—as “the capacity to hurt” (Lively, 1976).
infraction, what else could it do? And, if one member's retaliative behavior could have such an impact on the group, what were the implications for future group interaction? Rather than test that self-imposed boundary question, the group opted to set up rigorous controls in an attempt to police its own behavior for the remainder of the conference. The attack, then, became a way for the group to enforce a "niceness" norm with minimal tolerance for criticism or digression from acceptable and non-confrontational group themes or behaviors.

Group E's early sessions were also fairly typical for Psych 601. After the Co-Consultant (Ms. Berkowitz) presented the charge (that the task of the small group is to provide members an opportunity to study their own behavior in the here and now), the group spent time trying to get her to answer questions or respond in some way. Failing to get any kind of reaction, the group gave up and decided that they should probably get things started on their own. So, they began to introduce themselves: name, academic affiliation (which department), some personal details. All of this was fairly standard for Tavistock-type start-up group sessions. They compared American culture with Chinese and Japanese — and asked questions of the members from overseas. Like Group B, Group E also experienced a particularly dramatic episode of group attack. And, like Group B, the language from the early sessions of Group E was characterized by a dominant symbolic theme relating to invasion, antagonism, attack, and defense.

Adina wondered whether workers outside the building were "planted" there [like a bomb] by the conference staff as "diversionary devices." (E1-1)

Stuart discussed the fact that the American educational system punishes people for "wrong-doing, with little recognition for what's right." (E1-1)
Hermann said that in Germany, it's harder to break into groups and make friends. (E1-1)

Patrick said that in New Hampshire, it's also difficult to break into groups; outsiders are viewed with suspicion. (E1-1)

Adina told about living in Israel where everyone had been in the military and where Israelis kept themselves separate from foreigners. (E1-1)

Veronica asked whether the business school students were forced to take this course. (E1-1)

Stuart said that people are cautious when meeting new people. (E1-1)

Adina said that there are times in her life she'd like to break the rules and be able to say no (when someone as a matter of politeness asks if they should continue). (E1-1)

Joyce said she felt "kind of invaded" when a stranger in the park started to talk to her. (E1-1)

Veronica said that the group members would be throwing things at each other by Sunday. (E1-2)

Adina said that she felt like she had expelled the Consultants in her mind. (E1-2)

Hermann talked about the fact that people don't just walk past the scene of a "horrible, bloody" accident without doing something. (E1-2)

Veronica asked if you want to get involved if someone is hurt. (E1-2)

Adina pointed out that if someone in this group were hurt, she would stop. "I feel you're safe people." (E1-2)

Veronica asked what process was necessary for them to survive. (E1-2)

Patrick said it seemed like the group was trying to avoid confrontation. (E1-3)

Veronica said that Patrick's point about not wanting to be attacked was important. (E1-3)

Joyce responded by saying "No one's being attacked here." (E1-3)
Adina said that her background tells her to speak up, don’t get trampled by the group. (E1-4)

Joyce said she wanted to “wring his [Dr. Weller’s] neck.” (E1-4)

Sam described the seat between the Consultant and the Co-Consultant as “dangerous territory.” (E2-1)

Adina replied that the danger is self-imposed. (E2-1)

Hermann and Sam stated that fighting is productive. (E2-1)

Sam said that in Lord of the Flies, splitting into two groups was “non-productive and downright dangerous.” (E2-1)

Group E’s metaphors of power, danger, punishment, invasion, and danger certainly evoked a tone that was reflected in the group attack and highly emotional and dramatic events that would take place later (E3-2). The group attack was a complicated, prolonged event; and, like the episode in Group B, had significant impact on the group’s behavior for the remainder of the conference. In Group B, the group attack took place during one session; in Group E, however, the group attack targeting Stuart (a fifty-ish pediatrician specializing in adolescent health) dragged out over multiple sessions.

Members started articulating their anger with Stuart on the first day, continued making disparaging and critical comments about Stuart’s behavior and participation on a regular basis, and things culminated in the events of the third day of the conference.

When the Consultants and Observers entered on the third day, there were several dyad or triad conversations taking place. As those subsided, the group discussed (and disagreed) about how to “handle” the Consultants. Lai-Fong, Cynthia, and Michiko all expressed views that it was time to stop letting the Consultants control the process. Albert agreed with them and brought up the idea discussed earlier to identify a “facilitator” from among the membership to take on the leadership role. Stuart responded to this by quoting one of Dr. Weller’s earlier interventions that described the group as “in its adolescence and struggling to grow and mature.” Adina followed this by stating that she thought the group should follow the
leadership and authority and experience of the Consultants. Albert, Lai-Fong, Joyce, and Veronica argued that it was time for the group to have confidence in themselves and work without the Consultants. They each— with increasing force—declared that they were “frustrated” and “unhappy” with Stuart. They said he insisted on speaking for the whole group instead of just himself—and that he had taken power and leadership that they did not want him to have. Stuart said he had been quieter the day before when he thought the group was tired of him, and that for protection he chose the seat between his “two allies”: Dr. Weller and Ms. Berkowitz. The discussion grew more emphatic as the session drew to a close; at that point, Sam made a very late, very noisy entrance, apologizing for falling back to sleep after his alarm went off.

This first session of the third day, then, established that the group attack against Stuart was well underway. On previous days, group members had already begun to express frustration with Stuart. Hermann (E2-1) had indicated in annoyance that Stuart was shouting and pointing; in the same session, Joyce and Adina both said that they were getting angry with Stuart. Two sessions later (E2-3), Lai-Fong described how she “resented” being questioned by Stuart, and Adina said she was still angry with Stuart. Adina went on to say pointedly that some people just talk to be heard. Despite the repeated critical feedback from various sources, Stuart continued to talk at length, presenting long-winded theories and ideas about group dynamics, authority, leadership, adolescent development, and other seemingly relevant topics. Alongside the unfolding feelings about Stuart, these sessions also emphasized that Adina had been the only other fairly consistent voice defending the authority and leadership of the Consultants.

During the on-going criticism of Stuart, Adina also spoke a great deal: when a member shared an opinion about Stuart, Adina joined in. She had perspectives and thoughts on almost every topic, and had even acknowledged that she had a tendency to attempt to dominate conversations. Like Stuart, she took it upon herself to question others about their actions. She disagreed with Hermann’s actions when he asked people
if they minded if he continued, but he did not bother to wait for the group to respond before he continued (E1-1). She challenged Veronica’s use of “we” instead of “I” (E1-2), and cited the bulkpack to correct one of Veronica’s later assertions about when the group would rebel against the Consultants. And she wondered aloud, somewhat sarcastically, whether Cynthia would move her boss’s chair in a workplace setting (E1-2). Thus, both Stuart and Adina occupied a lot of “air time” in the group.

In addition, they had something else in common: both had become the voices of dependency (Bion, 1961) in the group dynamic. Stuart had taken to sitting next to Dr. Weller in several sessions and attempting to “translate” his interventions when the group seemed mystified by what Dr. Weller had said. Adina brought out her bulkpack on the first day and kept it handy, referring to it to bring in points about what the readings say.

In E3-1, as described above, Stuart continued to quote the Consultant interventions, while Adina argued for following the leadership of the Consultants—even if it was frustrating and confusing. Adina had at the same time voiced some of her frustrations with the way the Consultants exercised authority. Yet, both Stuart and Adina, in their own ways, had taken on the functions of “surrogate” authority in the group.

Session E3-2 began with light-hearted discussion of how many muffins Sam had eaten since his late arrival—and his method of eating the muffins. The group again discussed whether the Consultants should be the ones who determined the starting and ending times for the session. Sam acknowledged that he was aggravated with the prior sessions and wanted to go around the room and find out what people are thinking. Hermann asked him why he was aggravated, but the group stopped him and decided that there would be no questions during the go-round.

During the go-round, members expressed frustration with the group’s current situation. Mary said she felt like the group was going in circles. Albert said the group didn’t stay on topic. Veronica found herself impatient about making progress. Hermann said he was aggravated when
some participants talk too much and likes it more when everyone is involved. Myra followed this by saying that the group’s leaders seemed to be established by how much air-time people have. Joyce said she withdrew when the conversation was monopolized by one or two people who talked on and on and that she wanted to hear everybody. After the go-round ended, Mary emphasized that she learned from hearing from those who don’t talk too often.

The group began to rejoice in the “success” of their go-round because it helped bring “other voices” into the group. Their euphoria was short-lived, however, and they soon began another academic discussion of the nature of authority. Members made pronouncements about what the group “should” do, and interviewed one another about ideas and suggestions, growing increasingly frustrated.

Sam re-introduced the idea that the group allowed a few people to talk all the time, and Stuart started to propose another go-round when Dr. Weller made an intervention about the group’s struggle with authority. Adina followed Dr. Weller’s intervention saying that she “felt inhibited by what Hermann said.” No one responded and the group instead focused on Stuart’s behavior. Joyce talked about her discomfort with conflict, but she said she was unhappy that the group had allowed Stuart to keep talking and no one stopped him. “I’m about to be in a conflict,” she said, and that made her “incredibly uncomfortable.” She didn’t have the strength to take over or even prevent it, so she just let Stuart go on. In response, Adina blurted out: “I’m feeling very threatened right now. You referred to Stuart, but I get a lot of air time too. Was Hermann referring to me, too?”

Hermann said he was tired of listening to Stuart, and Adina asked him if he “tuned out” when she spoke. Hermann told her she did get a lot of air time, but that she had prior knowledge and used it. The group talked about Stuart’s role and about Adina’s role (with Myra pointing out that she often appreciated what Adina had to say). Adina started to cry. It began softly, but quickly turned into convulsive sobbing.

Suddenly, Adina pointed wildly at Hermann (a student from Germany) and screamed that she was threatened by him in particular and felt completely overwhelmed by his “German-ness.” She shouted that his very presence in the room reminded her of Nazism and his every movement evoked the “slaughter of Jews in the gas chambers.” She gestured hysterically toward Hermann’s sneakers, shrieking that the
patterns on the soles had Jewish stars on them and that he was "crunching the bones of Jews" that had died at Auschwitz and Dachau and Buchenwald. Adina was sobbing and wailing while the group sat in stunned silence as the ending time for the session arrived. As Dr. Weller stood up to leave, his intervention pointed out that the group had a lot to sort out and it would serve it well to respect its boundaries.

This dramatic event had a profound impact on the group's interaction, both in the moment and subsequently. The most obvious consequences were that (1) Hermann became, effectively, silent for the remainder of the conference (even though he had been a fairly active participant during the conference’s first two days), and (2) the group developed a pattern of very little criticism of other members.54

As with Group B, the events described constituted a group attack in Group E with Stuart as the target. The motivation for the group attack on Stuart is rooted primarily in displacement: Stuart was the recipient of the group’s anger and hostility toward the Consultants, particularly Dr. Weller, the senior Consultant. Stuart, like Dr. Weller, had the title "Dr." before his name also. He and Dr. Weller were the only people sitting in the circle who were not of traditional student age (early to mid-20’s). In addition, Stuart had introduced himself as a pediatrician, with a specialization in adolescent health; in other words, in his professional life, he helped young people and young adults. Thus, in several ways, he most “resembled” the senior Consultant, Dr. Weller (Whitaker, 1989).

The Co-Consultant, Ms. Berkowitz, had just received her MBA and was the junior partner — and the group perceived her as such. She was the same age as the majority of the group, did not have a PhD, and the group had noted that she was nervous (e.g., Patrick’s comment in E4-3 about her voice cracking during the introduction

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54 Adina’s attack on Hermann cannot be viewed as a group attack because although no one intervened to stop Adina or to limit the impact on Hermann, no group members ever joined Adina in any way in her outburst or supported her in any way.

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The group paid far less attention to her interventions and, in E2-3, her name card was removed from the room, while Dr. Weller’s name card was moved to Ms. Berkowitz’s seat. It does not seem accidental, then, that the group attack ended up with Adina as a partial target, as well. While the group’s primary focus was to stop Stuart, Adina was clearly engaged in some of the same behaviors and, as such, represented a secondary surrogate authority in much the same way that the group saw Ms. Berkowitz’s power and authority as secondary to Dr. Weller’s. Thus, the group attack ended up targeting two members similar to the Consultant, two members on whom the group could displace its aggression toward the Consultants.

In addition to seeing the group attack as driven by displacement, it is also possible to view it as a form of discarding: the group was prepared to confront directly their own anxieties and strategies for managing the Consultants and, thus, no longer needed the surrogate authority functions that Stuart and Adina (in part) were providing. Unlike Stuart, however, Adina clearly recognized that she was becoming a target of group attack (E4-5) and she engaged in dramatic, self-protective measures. Her actions allowed her to silence Hermann, the first member of the go-round to suggest that some participants talk too much, and make herself safe from any kind of more direct attack.

Adina made her pain very obvious. It may not have been pain about the historic threat of Nazism, but it was pain from knowing that she was being attacked for talking too much. Hermann was the person who first raised the issue in the go-round; he had also taken the initiative in several other episodes of group life, to the extent that on day two Patrick positively attributed the first “power move” to Hermann for his actions in

Dr. Weller had distributed 4x6 index cards at the beginning of E1-1 so that everyone could write their name and then fold the card and leave it on the floor in front of them — to make names more familiar and easier to remember.
trying to find out more about the source of the drilling and hammering noises outside the classroom. And, not accidentally, he was the person Adina used to claim the proverbial “moral high ground” by placing herself in the position as both identifying with and simultaneously trying to be the defender of the Holocaust’s victims.

Because of Adina’s hysterics, it was easy for the group to lose track of Stuart’s response to the attack, but he, too, was experiencing pain. Stuart did, however, become significantly less participatory after the go-round and group attack in E3-2. In the following session he asked the group why they responded to Adina’s pain and not his own. “I’m angry because they thought your [Adina’s] pain was worse than mine. They didn’t see my pain.” The group attempted to justify their differential reactions to Stuart and Adina by pointing out Stuart’s stoic expressions. After this discussion, Stuart became less talkative, and continued that way for the remainder of the conference. The group attack, then, did stop Stuart; he no longer attempted to be the surrogate authority. Silencing Hermann became a by-product of the attack, and clearly an acceptable one to the group; this was not necessarily an intentional part of the discarding aspect of the group attack involving Stuart and Adina, but the group did end up effectively altering Hermann’s role. No attempts were made, until the final small group session (E4-5) even to notice or inquire about Hermann’s silence since the event.

The examples from Group B and Group E illustrate the ways in which use of violent or aggressive metaphors and imagery at the initial stages of the conference may presage (or be linked to) later instances of intense or prolonged group attack. While all groups experienced group attack, these two groups had some of the more intense and extreme events. Likewise, Groups B and E also made the most consistent and prominent use of forceful metaphors and images of war, defense, attack, and hostility early in group
life. And these metaphors employed in the early discussions may have been the markers for the intensity of the subsequent group attacks.
Chapter 5: Group Attack in the Developmental Process

Tessie Hutchinson was in the center of a cleared space by now, and she held her hands out desperately as the villagers moved in on her. "It isn’t fair," she said. A stone hit her on the side of the head. Old Man Warner was saying, "Come on, come on, everyone." Steve Adams was in the front of the crowd of villagers, with Mrs. Graves beside him.

"It isn’t fair, it isn’t right," Mrs. Hutchinson screamed, and then they were upon her.

- "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson (1982)

Group Attack and the “Authority” Phase

The previous chapter identified the different mechanisms groups use to identify or select targets of group attack (projection, displacement, and discarding), and the linguistic or conversational cues (metaphors) that may indicate the intensity or duration of subsequent group attack. This chapter describes the way in which group attack occupies a particular time and place in the life cycle of the Psych 601 groups – and how the attacks are rooted in the group’s struggle with authority issues.

In the context of Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery,” the attack on Tessie Hutchinson takes place at the end of the narrative arc. But, in the life cycles of the Psych 601 groups, the group attacks were not the concluding episodes in the tale. On the
contrary, group attacks seemed to take place closer to the midpoint in the lives of the Psych 601 groups. One of the observations derived from the Psych 601 field data is that all but one of the nine episodes of group attack behavior took place during the first “half” of the group’s working time together over the course of the four-day conference. Why, then, was one particular time period in the life cycle of the Psych 601 groups more conducive to group attack than another?

The focus on the Consultant’s authority

One of the key features of the small group experience in Psych 601 is the aberrant behavior of the course-designated authority figure, the Consultant. As described in Chapter 1, at the designated starting time for the Psych 601 Small Group session, the Consultant enters, sits down, states that “the purpose of the Small Group is to provide members an opportunity to study their own behavior in the here and now” and says nothing more for the moment. Without eye contact or verbal interaction with the Consultant, the group members become confused and wait for the Consultant to say or do more. Typically, some group members will try to ask questions of the Consultant, or verbally prod the Consultant to speak. When it becomes evident that the Consultant is not planning to say anything more at that point, the group members usually try to figure out what they “should” do next. There are repeated references in the field notes – across all six groups – to the members trying to make sense of behavior that they think of as very strange or utterly bizarre. Group members at different times described the Consultant as a “Sphinx,” a “computer,” a “tree,” “just sitting there doing nothing,” and “catatonic.” What emerges is that the groups put a great deal of time and energy into discussing and attempting to make sense of the aberrant nature of the Consultant role.
Within the structure of Psych 601, the role of the Consultants is to offer here-and-now interpretations about the dynamics of the group – to help further the group’s learning; otherwise, the Consultants rarely speak. Interestingly, the Consultants in all the Psych 601 groups observed did make interventions in every session – and usually more than one. Those interventions are designed to point out specific aspects of the group’s functioning, identify patterns or strategies employed by the group members, and help the group identify and stay focused on the work of examining their own behavior in the here-and-now (Alford, 1995; Kuriloff & Santoro, 1988; Smith & Comer, 1994).

In spite of the Consultant interventions, my field notes indicate that the group members clearly perceived the Consultant as an “absent” authority figure. Many of the Consultant interventions are fairly straightforward; for example, after a lengthy discussion of a variety of international trips, a Consultant may point out that the travel destinations being discussed seem to indicate that the group members would like to be anywhere but in the room for this course. In spite of the relative obviousness of this

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56 My own experience as both a student member of a Psych 601 group in the 1980's and my subsequent participation as an Observer and Researcher years later mirrors the members’ experience of the Consultant. For years after taking Psych 601, I described the course as one where the “professor” sits there and says absolutely nothing for days. And while this sounded like an exaggeration, it was indeed how I remembered the experience. During my first opportunity as an Observer (as part of Psych 701), by pure chance I ended up observing the very same Consultant who had been the Consultant for the Psych 601 group in which I had been enrolled years earlier. After the first day, I commented to her that she was much more talkative and interactive now than she had been when I took the course. She, and the course Director, both assured me that the basic style and pattern of Consultant interaction had not changed substantially. Looking back, I realized that the Consultants did indeed speak when I was a student in Psych 601. As an Observer with subsequent groups, I asked other Observers (virtually all of whom had taken Psych 601 as a prerequisite for enrolling in Psych 701) about their recollections of Consultant interaction. And almost all had memories similar to mine: of a silent, utterly non-responsive Consultant for days on end. The Consultants were not silent and non-responsive, but each of us had experienced their aberrant behavior as somehow an abdication of their authority role. This is the same sensation that the members of the observed Psych 601 groups are experiencing and attempting to make sense of in the moment.
statement, the members seem utterly mystified and unable to interpret or make sense of
the intervention.

Early on, members described the Consultant interventions as “gibberish” or so
“incredibly cryptic” as to be beyond the comprehension of the group. The responses of
the members – and the perception of the Consultants as completely “absent” or non-
interactive – are not reflected in the reality of the fairly consistent nature of the
Consultants’ interaction and interventions. The members’ responses are, instead, a result
of the high level of anxiety brought about when the authority figure behaves in an
unexpected way and members believe that, as a result, they have been “abandoned.” The
Consultants are present and will and do make interventions to help further the learning.
But, the emotional state of the group members is that they believe that the authority
figure has relinquished all authority and they are left to their own devices – a very scary
proposition.

Despite the perception of the Consultant’s abdication of authority, the Psych 601
group members remain keenly focused on and aware of the Consultants. They pay
attention to and comment on virtually every movement of the Consultant, noting, for
example, when the Consultant smiles, frowns, scratches, shifts in the seat, leans forward,
or any other minor change in the Consultant’s position or demeanor. It would not be
amiss to describe their behavior toward the Consultant as “obsessive” in many ways –
and throughout the first day or two of the conference, the group members remain fixated
on the Consultant and her/his behavior.

This fixation runs directly counter to the strongly professed desire of some group
members to disregard the Consultant completely. In every group, some members argued
strongly that the Consultant was not participating and, therefore, must be ignored – or
even expelled. They became angered when other group members wanted to pay attention to the Consultants, or when the group allowed a Consultant intervention to interrupt the group’s activities or conversation. And every Psych 601 group discussed and enacted dramatic ways to “handle” the Consultant’s presence, including, for example: tearing up the Consultant’s name tag, referring to the Consultant by a first name or an incorrect or mis-pronounced name, using a disparaging term to refer to the Consultant, sitting in or putting objects on the Consultant’s chair, or moving the Consultant’s chair out of the circle or out of the room.

Equally forcefully, other group members contended that it is important to attend to the things the Consultant says; the position of these group members is that the Consultant is the professor and the expert and, in spite of the aberrant behavior, is still the one from whom the group will learn. These members may be frustrated by the Consultant’s non-responsiveness, but, their argument goes, the Consultant is the authority and must be heeded.

*Seeking approval or espousing insurrection: Two sides of the same coin*

These two positions — closely heeding the Consultant’s interventions and completely disregarding the Consultant altogether — are manifest in every one of the Psych 601 groups observed. And these two positions — which Bion (1961) refers to as the dependent and counterdependent valences — are in reality the two sides of the same coin. For both of them reflect the group’s intense, unrelenting focus on the Consultant and the Consultant’s authority.

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57 The notion of *dependency* (discussed in Chapter Two) is one in which the group members believe they have met to gain security and approval from the authority. The counterdependent energy reflects the frustration, disappointment, hostility, and outright anger when the authority figure does not live up to those expectations (c.f., Braucher, 2000; Kahn, 1995; Rioch, 1975; Stein, 2000; Turquet, 1985).
Chapter 5

The reality is that in spite of strong exhortations and even sometimes virtual group unanimity in deciding to ignore the Consultant, the Consultant remains a primary preoccupation for the group. The members may give voice to the notion that the Consultant, by virtue of non-responsiveness, has surrendered any claim to authority in the group. But, the group members’ actions belie their words. In fact, those members who strongly express dependent and counterdependent viewpoints are sometimes the most fixated on the Consultant’s words and actions. The members giving voice to both the dependent and counterdependent feelings articulate those issues for the entire group (Ettin, 1996a, 1996b; Wells, 1980, 1985) — for the concerns about the Consultant’s role and authority are a preoccupation to some degree for every member of the group.

The group members are very much aware of the authority of the Consultant — and talk consistently in three ways about the manifestations of that authority:

1. The Consultant’s status as an “expert” — or at the very least as one substantially more knowledgeable than the group members about the subject matter;

2. The Consultant’s power to start and stop the sessions by entering and departing the room at pre-determined times according to the conference schedule (marking the conference boundaries); and

3. Most importantly, the Consultant’s power to grade members’ papers, assign the final grade for the course, and ultimately determine whether a student passes or fails Psych 601. For in the life of a university student, giving grades represents the power of life and death.

The Psych 601 students are keenly aware of all of these features of the Consultants’ authority — and every group observed talked about all three of these authority components.
during their group sessions. The group members’ awareness of the Consultants’ authority and power are reflected in the enduring focus on the Consultants throughout the first few days of the conference.

The struggle with authority issues

Every single group — without exception — struggled with the issue of how to “manage” the presence of the Consultant. Taking a variety of forms, this was the primary topic of conversation throughout the first two days of every Psych 601 group. Even when the groups made explicit, extensively-negotiated pacts to stop discussing the Consultant, no group was ever able to adhere to that pact for long — and conversation always ended up returning to the “problem” of how to handle the Consultant. The bottom line in all of this: the Consultant and her/his authority remained a primary concern of the Psych 601 group members — until they began the work of figuring out how the issues pertaining to authority have had an impact on the group’s interaction.

It is not until the group begins to talk openly about the ways in which they have managed the presence of the institutional authority (the Consultant) in the room that the members’ anxiety will begin to diminish and the Consultant’s behavior begins to shift. Group members do this work by discussing how they have handled the anxiety produced by the Consultant’s behavior and the overall Psych 601 experience (e.g., by working extra hard to try and please the Consultant, by denying that the Consultant has any authority whatsoever, by attempting to remove the Consultant from the process or the room) in the specific context of this group experience. In other words, the task is not to talk about ways to handle authority at home or at work or in other classes, but to examine how authority has been and is being handled in the context of the Psych 601 small group.
The acknowledgement of the individual and group-level strategies for managing the Consultant helps defuse some of the anxiety.

*Group attack during a perceived power vacuum*

Virtually every one of the incidents of group attack in the Psych 601 groups observed took place before the group members had openly discussed how the group had “handled” the Consultants. In other words, the most likely time for group attack was when group members were very anxious about the Consultant’s behavior and simultaneously unable or unwilling to do the work (Bion, 1961) of examining their own behavior in the here-and-now, particularly as it pertained to the relationship with conference-designated authority.

It appears, then, that group attack mode unfolds when the groups are frustrated, angry, and disappointed with what they perceive to be the failure of the authority to lead. Because the authority is not behaving the way an authority “should,” the group thinking seems to go, the group may be a very dangerous place. Or, perhaps, because of the perceived “vacuum” created by the Consultant’s behavior, the group’s struggles around authority make the group a dangerous place. And, as self-fulfilling prophecies, the manifestations of group attack make real the group’s very anxiety about the dangers of the group. Eight of the nine incidents of group attack observed across all six Psych 601 groups took place within the first half of the group’s life cycle – during the very time when the group members were confronting their own anxieties and confusion and fears as a result of the aberrant authority functioning.

The notion that particular kinds of events or processes – particularly attack and conflict-related behaviors – take place at particular phases in group life has strong support in the literature. In their model of group development, for example, Bennis and
Shepard (1956) referred to one component of the first half of the group experience as the most “stressful and unpleasant in the life of the group” (1956:134). More recently, Wright and his colleagues (1988), for example, write:

Observers of group process identify several stages, characterized by specific concerns and conflicts which occur in regular fashion across most groups. A number of authors (Beck & Peters, 1981; Eagle & Newton, 1981; Levine, 1979; Livesley & MacKenzie, 1983) have noted that scapegoating processes are likely at particular developmental points in group life (1988: 36-37).

Smith and Berg (1987) give voice to this same idea, identifying the ways in which conflict is incorporated into theoretical ideas about phases in group life, and they write that “many of the phase theories of group development include a phase that has conflict as a central theme” (1987: 39). While theorists may debate which elements of group development take place at various times, what emerges clearly from the observation data from Psych 601 is that the phenomenon of group attack is indeed rooted in a particular time or stage in the life of the self-study group.

**The Timing of Group Attack**

In the early phases of group life, the group members are struggling intently with issues pertaining to authority. Across all six groups observed, members consistently gave voice to their sense of frustration and bewilderment at the Consultant’s behavior as the course began. With varying reactions and emotions, they feel abandoned by the Consultant and are, consequently, wrestling with how to establish some kind of authority in the room in the face of the fact that the conference-designated leader seems to have abdicated responsibility. And, even though the group members are aware that no member-appointed authority could possibly have the grading power of even the aberrant
or non-responsive Consultant, the desire for some authority structure is more powerful than the members’ ability to tolerate the existential anxiety of a perceived leaderless existence.

Given that virtually all of the group attacks observed took place in the first half of the life of the Psych 601 groups, the attacks appear to be connected to this very struggle with authority issues. Based on the field observation data, I argue that, just as Girard (1977, 1986; Girard & Müller, 1996; Marvin & Ingle, 1999) describes the use of violence in societies, the Psych 601 groups engage in the sacrifice of an individual member through group attack as a way of controlling the potential for violence. This sacrifice through group attack, then, becomes the group’s means of establishing authority.

In Violence and the Sacred, Girard (1977) posits that ritual sacrifice came about and is sustained by the need of the organization – a group, a tribe, or a nation – to contain the internally-directed violence that threatens to overwhelm the entity in internecine, Hobbesian conflict: the war of all against all. In the context of Psych 601, the group attack, as Marvin and Ingle (1999) argue in their discussion of societies and nations, can be seen as a form of sacrifice to establish authority and unify the group. The Consultant’s perceived abdication of authority triggers a kind of crisis, one in which the boundaries are no longer clear or certain. Thus, the group must struggle to establish (or, perhaps, re-establish) authority in the group. The group attack, then, becomes a way of warding off the chaos and terror of a structureless setting.

58 The power to give grades can be viewed, speaking symbolically, as the power of life and death within the context of the academic setting.
My field data points to three particular aspects of the ways in which groups use group attack in the process of establishing authority. Each of these approaches is an attempt to help the group develop or reinstate an authority structure:

1. The groups "create" transgressors as a mean of enforcing group norms.
2. The groups use group attack to prevent any member from competing with and possibly deposing the Consultant.
3. The groups create a "victim" as a sacrifice to compel the Consultant to take up her/his authority.

Group Attack and the "Creation" of Transgressors

I have suggested that a possible aspect of group attack events in the earlier phases of group life is related to the group’s need to create transgressors. By successfully labeling a particular individual as the transgressor, the group is able to make manifest its rules and establish its authority to enforce adherence to the rules. One of the phenomena that emerged repeatedly in the groups was the intense desire to declare everyone in the group as equal – while simultaneously rendering everyone obviously unequal in practice.\(^{59}\) In all the Psych 601 groups observed, this professed desire for everyone to be equal (i.e., the same) was certainly evident among the student members; and it was often the case that the members gave voice to the counter-dependent (Bion, 1961) idea that the Consultants were equal to the other members also.

The groups took action to make sure that all members, whenever possible, acted in adherence to the group’s explicit or more often implicit norms or rules. In other

\(^{59}\) This is in many ways the essence of Smith and Berg’s (1987a, 1987b, 1995) notion of the Paradox of Identity, “the struggle of individuals and the group to establish a unique and meaningful identity by attempting to indicate how each is separate from the other, while all the time turning out to actually be affirming the ways each is an integral part of the other” (1987b: 639).
words, the group’s actual behaviors indicated that the group attack had absolutely nothing to do with this professed desire for equality and had everything to do with making the rules very clear by attacking those who violate them. Thus, what the group is saying and what the group is doing are inconsistent. The group’s reality is that members only have the right or option to do what the authority of the group allows; and when some have the power over others to enforce the rules, then by definition that means they are not all the same. For the member who persists in violating the rules – even when those rules are newly formed or inconsistently applied – group attack is the response.

This is the dynamic of the group that Miller (1998) refers to as a “lynch mob.” Turquet’s (1985) analysis is that “groups can be ruthless toward their members; and members can avoid receiving such treatment only by fitting in with the group’s roles and requirements” (1985: 362). Or, as Kanter writes, “it is easier, more comfortable, or safer to keep quiet and be swept along by the current” (1988: 37-38). This is also the driving force behind Janis’ “groupthink” phenomenon (Janis, 1972, 1982; Leana, 1985; McCauley, 1989; Moorhead & Montanari, 1986; Street, 1997) – that group members who run counter to the group’s collective, often idealized vision of itself are either explicitly or implicitly pressured to submit or are subject to attack.

The group seems to believe that things can be made right by removing or reforming the offending member (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994) – that if the transgressor is eliminated, “the group will come together and the conflict will be over; or [the group] may seek an equally destructive but seemingly more caring solution by trying to change the [transgressor] so that he ‘fits into’ the group better” (Dugo & Beck, 1984: 34). As Oehler and Perault write, this group attack process “may help to foster cohesion among
members and promote group homeostasis by providing a ‘common enemy’ around which
to unify in the face of threatening internal conflict” (1986: 76).

In various group attacks, the group members gave voice to this very desire to
remove the offending member to make everything “OK” in the group once again. In the
group attack on Ronnie (described below) in Group C, for example, group members
indicated that things would be moving more productively in the group if Ronnie made
significant changes in her interaction style and behaved as the members wished. In
Group A, the group attack on Allan (described in Chapter 6) provided a similar example:
after venting their fury at Allan, group members Karla, Sandra, and Glenda indicated that
they were no longer willing to deal with Allan and they felt this would have a significant
impact on the group’s continued functioning. Other members joined them to complain
about Allan’s negative effects on the group, to the point that Ted had to reassure
members that the group was developing a “strong alliance against Allan” in order to
“protect” members so that the group could continue. In this way, the group was able to
create a defensive “barrier” around Allan in an attempt to remove his influence from the
group interaction.

In these various instances, it appears that the group’s collective fantasy is that all
will be well – if only they can stop one member from breaking the rules.

We would all like to believe that the world is fundamentally a logical,
well-managed place. Since the evidence against this is overwhelming it is
inevitable that we seek a defence against finding it so frighteningly unsafe.
A popular explanation, going back at least to the Old Testament story of
Jonah, is that all would be well if only the evil ones, the trouble-makers,
could be got rid of (Obholzer & Roberts, 1994: 129).
Or, as Wright and his colleagues put it, "as the fable goes, nobody wanted to be the first to point out to the emperor that he wore no clothes. Compliance with the norms and mores of a group has always proved the safest route" (1988: 36).

Marvin and Ingle (1999) write about the large-scale issues that face a nation in a way that applies equally well to the dynamic in Psych 601. They say that one of the features of group interaction is that the group will indeed sacrifice individual members; and, concomitantly, group members will know something is indeed a rule when someone has been attacked/sacrificed because of a violation. In the context of Psych 601, there are a number of examples of the group attack targeting those who had somehow violated the group’s rules or its often unspoken code of conduct.

In Group B, the group decided to engage in some spontaneous “activity” to “ease the tension” (as they described it) in the room. When one group member, Annette, did not participate and ultimately criticized the group’s actions, the group attacked her, cowing her into submission the next time the group chose to do an activity.

Group B returned (B1-4) from the first day’s intergroup event full of energy and enthusiasm. Despite the boisterous spirits, the group again became immersed in the on-going discussion about whether they needed direction from the Consultant or whether they could fashion their own structure and direction. Several members tossed out suggestions for activities: a group hug, some kind of icebreaker activity, the game Liar’s Poker. Suddenly, Kate shouted excitedly, “Everyone stand up!” Immediately, all the members except for Annette (a medical student, in the eighth month of her pregnancy) stood up.

People grinned broadly and talked animatedly – although not about the fact that they were standing. The group continued its discussion about the need for structure and the desire to include or exclude the Consultant – and all discussion occurred with everyone but Annette standing. This went on for several minutes until several members decided to sit down again. Annette had remained seated throughout this.
As the group talked about the “standing up” event, members asserted that the “standing up” event was simply a spontaneous, fun thing for everyone to do to ease some of the tension. Martin pointed out, though, that not everyone participated: Annette did not stand. Annette responded by saying that her not standing up had nothing to do with being pregnant. “I just didn’t see the point,” she said flatly. Quietly at first, Chrissy expressed her anger over the fact that Annette refused to trust the group when everyone else stood up. She felt that Annette was not willing to be a member of the group or even cooperate. Kate, who had initiated the activity, said she felt violated by Annette’s rigid position. Lou joined them and said that he had the same feelings about standing as Annette did, but stood up anyway. He told Annette that he was really “disheartened” by her and that his trust in her had dropped a lot. Others echoed this sentiment.

Group B had engaged in a spontaneous, unplanned, seemingly unconscious event (Diamond, 1993; Hirschhorn & Krantz, 1982; Marshak & Katz, 1995; Stokes, 1994b). The “standing up” event made the group jubilant, until the recognition that Annette pointed out that the proverbial Emperor indeed had no clothes. She did not stand up because she “didn’t see the point,” not because of her pregnancy. In other words, when Annette’s inaction became one of active refusal to take part rather than based solely on physical limitations, the group could no longer tolerate her lack of compliance. And the content of the group attack on Annette focused on issues like trust, violation, and feeling disheartened.

In the group’s eyes, Annette had violated the unspoken social compact and refused to go along with everyone else in a group activity. The group’s earlier professed desire for equality was, in reality, at odds with the group’s actual behavior. Thus, the group attack had to do with the fact that Annette had given voice to the fact that the rules were illusory (she “didn’t see the point”). The rules are indeed imaginary, but the group is organized partly by its unspoken agreement to observe certain rules — even when the rules are not articulated and not real. Annette was attacked because she violated the
fundamental principle that group members agree not to disagree about the rules (cf., Marvin & Ingle, 1999).

In response to the group attack, Annette said very little. Later in the session, however, the group again stood up quickly to play two games of “Simon Says,” followed by a game of “Mother, May I?” This time, Annette stood with everyone else and took part in the games. The group attack had apparently succeeded in getting her to “see the point” and alter her behavior in conformity to the rules of the group. And, the attack on Annette served to make real the group’s power in its quest to somehow replace or supplant the authority of the Consultant.

Like the group attacks on Leah (Group B) or Stuart and Adina (Group E) described in Chapter 4, the group attack on Annette also took place in the earlier phases – in this case, on the first day – of the group’s life. Group B was still struggling with issues pertaining to authority and the Consultant – as evidenced in the content of their discussion, and even in the kinds of unplanned activities and games in which they chose to engage (e.g., the group’s choice of two games that are explicitly about obedience to an individual in authority: “Simon Says” and “Mother, May I?”). The group could not tolerate a member who violated group norms and said why she was doing so – and, as such, the group opted to attack Annette to ensure her future compliance and everyone else’s adherence to the group’s rules.

In another example of the creation of transgressors and group attack, Kit (her nickname) was the target in Group F. A large, self-described “ex-military” woman with a forceful, outspoken personality, Kit had an in-your-face quality that would have made it difficult for any group to ignore her. Her statements were blunt and provocative; in F2-1, for example, when Vince was indecisive about a course of action, she loudly exhorted
him to "Be a top!" Group F’s conversations had a fairly direct, some might say sexually explicit, quality. But, there were apparently limits to the "coarse" language and tone that the group would accept from its members. On the second day of the conference, the group attacked Kit for crossing that line.

As the conversation got underway in session F2-5, Denise observed that outside the room the group was cohesive, but back in the classroom there wasn’t a bond and some people didn’t talk. Kit interjected that if some people felt like they didn’t have a voice in the group, she didn’t feel sorry for them. “Get off your ass and say something,” she insisted. There was silence, followed by an immediate and negative response from the group. Emily said that she was upset by Kit’s comment, and feeling defensive. Lorraine angrily said that those “sitting on their asses” have reasons. Eileen told Kit that no one was asking for her sympathy. Pui-Fung emotionally told Kit that people may choose to be silent, but that people should not be silenced by behavior such as Kit’s. Sharon emphatically said that while the university may not be sensitive to people’s needs, the group certainly should be. Kit attempted to defend her comment, then spent the rest of the session sitting silently.

Kit had, like some other members, been outspoken and provocative. And the group had clearly tolerated this kind of interaction — up to a point. When Kit’s language became “vulgar” and hostile, the group labeled this as a transgression and acted to make sure that Kit’s disobedience was not repeated. Even typically quiet members such as Sharon joined in the attack on Kit, upset by her violation of the group’s evolving norms of relative courtesy and respect. Thus, the group members labeled Kit’s speech as an instance of disrespect — even though the group had accepted coarse language and challenges prior to that point — and used it as a justification to fashion Kit as a transgressor and mount a group attack against her.

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60 This is a reference to sexual behavior and position. Kit is commanding Vince to be the insertive ("active") rather than the receptive ("passive") partner in penetrative sexual intercourse. It can be seen as Kit’s way of telling him to “seize the day!”
When the group attack on Kit took place, the group was still struggling with issues around authority. In addition to early group conversations about how to handle Dr. Kendall’s presence in the room, the group attack had been preceded by an on-and-off discussion about the difficulties of watching one’s parents age and what it meant not to have one’s parents “be there” like they used to be. Thus, the group had been talking in a roundabout, rather removed fashion about authority issues, but had not yet done the work of examining how their behavior in the group context had helped them manage the Consultant’s presence. And it was while the group was dealing with the uncertainty of having an authority in the figure in the room who also did not seem to “be there” for the group that the group attack on Kit took place.

The timing of a group attack in Group C demonstrated the same pattern of attack behaviors taking place early in the group’s life — and the same phenomenon of creating a transgressor and attacking that member who seemingly violated the group’s rules of engagement. In that group, the target was Ronnie, one of several students in the group from the dental school. Ronnie was a composed young woman who had been fairly quiet through most of the early sessions. At the end of the first day, the group was mired in a discussion of how annoying they found the behavior of the Consultants (Dr. Weller and Ms. Greenbaum). Members talked about the Consultants’ “negative,” silent presence, frustrated that there were “two bodies” in the room who refused to give input like everyone else in the group. Ronnie pointed out that some people in the group rarely or never talked. Clara countered that the Consultant behavior was different: the Consultants were practically “catatonic.” Ronnie did not venture any other comments during the session — the final one of the day. The next day, as a strategy “to protect people from getting hurt” (as they described it), the group decided to appoint an
"observer" for each session; the observer’s function was never explicated, but Clara volunteered to do it the first time. Ronnie, like several other group members (e.g., Oliver, Mitch, and Annabel) did not talk during the session.

At the beginning of C2-2, Lana agreed to be the designated observer. Pieter (MBA student) got the discussion underway by saying that everyone is afraid to examine their own personal baggage. He asked two of the dentistry students, Lorraine and Ronnie, what they thought, because “we’ve not heard much from you today.” Ronnie replied that they had resolved those issues in the Dental School and that there were no authority issues. Immediately, Carmen angrily snapped that perhaps being in this group for four days could help Ronnie. Pieter quickly challenged Ronnie’s assertion about the Dental School. Mitch expressed his frustration with Ronnie’s comment and said that every time he heard another reference to the Dental School, he wanted to “cringe.”

In the next session (C2-3), Dr. Weller and Ms. Greenbaum were for the first time seated side by side — and the group discussed their preference for having the Consultants together. Meanwhile, Lana indicated that she was very happy that Ronnie and Lorraine were not able to sit together. She continued and said that Ronnie’s not talking was really bothering her, just as it bothered Carmen and Pieter. This led to an extended discussion with a number of members critically discussing Ronnie’s style — describing her as cold, annoying, impassive, and contrasting Ronnie (unfavorably) with other group members who did not talk a lot. Members said that Ronnie’s silence was “cold” and “flat,” as opposed to other quiet members who at least seemed more interested and engaged. Pieter ended up raising his voice and angrily asked Ronnie if she was as vulnerable as the rest of the group, with Jan and Lana vociferously agreeing that they were equally angered by Ronnie’s silence.

The group attack on Ronnie, then, was an attempt to force Ronnie to conform to the unspoken interactional standards the group had constructed; because Ronnie would not talk about her feelings and issues pertaining to authority, as other group members were attempting to do, she became a target of group attack. In addition, Ronnie had compounded her transgression by indicating her loyalty to or identification with another
group (the Dental School) rather than the Psych 601 small group. While others in the
group had been fairly silent, the group selected Ronnie as the target of group attack.
Sacrificing one of its member, the group attack helped establish the power and authority
of the group to enforce particular behaviors.

While the group attack itself became a way to unify the group and establish
authority, the particular selection of Ronnie as the target of group attack can also be seen
as displacement of the anger toward the Consultants. Group C had two Consultants: Dr.
Weller, a PhD psychologist, older, and professional in dress and demeanor; and Ms.
Greenbaum, an attractive, student-age woman (in C3-2, she would be referred to as
“voluptuous” by one group member). Ronnie’s stoic behavior was similar to the
unsmiling silent behavior of the Consultants, and, because she was also an attractive
young woman, she was particularly similar to Ms. Greenbaum, the Co-Consultant.
During C2-2, when the group attack got underway, Ronnie and Ms. Greenbaum were
seated next to one another. Even when Ms. Greenbaum made an intervention to point out
these similarities and positioning, Clara retorted that the Consultant was just trying to get
the group to focus on her (Ms. Greenbaum) instead of on the actual problem (i.e.,
Ronnie). The group was not to be deflected and continued to find fault with Ronnie’s
behavior and demeanor throughout the two sessions. It is interesting to note that in spite
of having an observer “to protect people from getting hurt” designated during those
sessions, the group attack proceeded with gusto; and Lana, one of the attackers, had also
been the designated observer.

Like in the other groups, the group attack on Ronnie took place before the group
had begun to talk openly about the ways it had managed authority issues in the group. It
was not until later in the conference that Group C began to talk about the various
strategies the group members had employed to “handle” the authority in the room and started to examine how their reactions to the Consultants affected their individual and group behavior in the here-and-now.

*Group Attack and Competition*

The second perspective to help explain aspects of the phenomenon of group attack in the early phases of group life conjectures that groups use group attack to prevent any member from competing with and possibly deposing the Consultant. In other words, group attack serves as a way of establishing authority by preventing any single group member from challenging or displacing the Consultant — or possibly receiving the seeming “blessing” of the Consultant. In this way, the dependent and counterdependent (Armstrong, 1992; Bion, 1961) feelings and behaviors are both in operation: the dependent energy seeks approval from the Consultant while the counterdependent energy seeks to topple the Consultant. And either of these is threatening for the group because they could mean that one member is “anointed” by the Consultant, or that one member takes the place of the Consultant.

The group may begin with the myth or fantasy that it can indeed be free of competition and strife (Hartmann & Gibbard, 1985). But, there is no way for them to make this a reality. Despite this, the group struggles and operates from a perspective which one of the Consultants referred to as “psychological Communism” (B2-5): where all group members must be essentially the same. Taking action to eliminate those who ardently attempt to curry favor with or compete with the Consultants is the way the group fights in its attempt to realize this fantasy. Stokes (1994) talks about groups in this phase as a “culture of paranoia and aggressive competitiveness” (1994: 26). As Dugo and Beck
view it in the context of group therapy, for example, “the predominant style of interaction is competitive” (1985: 31):

At this early phase in relationship building, there is an almost seductive and irresistible urge to perceive the situation as a power struggle in which the risk to the individual is that his needs will not be met unless he is a winner. The competition tends to become focused rather quickly into a distress with one member in particular who is scapegoated by the rest of the group. In focusing their energies this way, the rest of the group members draw together. They have established a kind of identity, not in knowing who they are as a group, but in agreeing that one member does not fit in. This can be thought of as a group defense mechanism that is generated because of the anxiety level and the difficulty of the task facing the group (Dugo & Beck, 1985: 31).

While Dugo and Beck use the term “scapegoat” fairly loosely, they emphasize that the group’s attack on an individual member may result from the internal competition the entire group is experiencing. Or, as Wright and his colleagues (1988) view it, the attacks “relate to competition for group leadership” (1988: 36). This leadership can take a variety of forms, but all relate to the internal competition among group members for authority. Thus, the group attack is designed to contain the competitive energy; in this way, the fantasy is that one and all will be equally able to get the “goodies” (e.g., attention, approval, praise) from the Consultant – or at the very least be secure in the knowledge that no other student member is in authority over them. But, this is merely a fantasy. Because, at the very same time, the group attack emphasizes the power and authority of the group over the individual in the absence of the Consultant once again taking up her/his rightful authority.

In Group D, this theme of competition played out very powerfully in the group attack on Marty during the early phases of interaction. Group D had 12 members (eight women and four men) and two female Consultants (Dr. Tappen and Ms. Greenbaum).
Issues pertaining to gender and to competition emerged in the discussions of the very first session. Marty was one of only two white, American men in the group; the other two men in the group were from Japan and India. Marty introduced himself by saying that he came from a big family with three sisters, so he was “socialized to be slightly feminine.” The group clearly took note of this somewhat provocative comment – and it was referenced repeatedly in subsequent sessions. My field notes from the break after the first session indicate that the Consultants pointed out that their experience of the session was that Marty was regularly competing with Ms. Greenbaum for physical space in the room (e.g., leaning over in front of her, spreading his arms in such a way that she had to tilt her head away), and that Lynn, one of the vocal women in the group, seemed to be attempting to compete with Dr. Tappen, referring to the Consultant by her first name because she “couldn’t remember” Dr. Tappen’s last name. In other words, Marty and Lynn attempted to compete with the Consultants in hopes of placing themselves in leadership positions. Thus, Group D got off to a start with two fairly vocal members competing with the Consultants or for the Consultants’ attention.

In D1-3, the group talked extensively about the process of making judgments about others. Jim described how business school students “rank one another” when they meet. Suzanne, a former middle school teacher, talked about how she was able to prevent the school kids from being nasty to one another, but she was unable to do that with the adults’ competition. Doreen said that she did not want to feel “scrutinized” in the group. A short while later, Lynn told the group that she was tired of only hearing vague generalizations from Marty. Monica followed this by describing Marty as playing the role of a “summarizer,” and Lynn added that she “resented” Marty’s role.

In this third session, then, the group members talked about the reality and impact of competition in other social settings (e.g., in an M.B.A. program, at a middle school), at which point Doreen brought the discussion to her concern about being “scrutinized” by
the group. Through both the oblique and direct references, as group members shared their concerns about being judged and "ranked" against one another, the powerful theme of competition emerged. And Lynn and Monica began the process of evaluating Marty’s contribution and participation in contrast with the others (i.e., he only summarized, while others "shared").

The members of Group D continued the theme of scrutiny, evaluation, and competition in both the first day’s intergroup event and in the subsequent small group session. The intergroup started off with a discussion of the feelings of “us versus them” (with references to several permutations of competition: between students in a group, students versus Consultants, and small group versus small group within the conference as a whole). The members of Group D returned for the final small group session of the first day (D1-4), expressing relief that they were about “even” with the other group, and then spent part of the session comparing themselves point-by-point to the other group. On the second day, the group attack on Marty continued and culminated in a series of scathing dismissals of Marty’s “work” and Marty’s “feelings” by women in the group.

As Day 2 got underway, the group struggled with whether or not they should identify leaders in the group – and whether these struggles were about gender issues. Lynn said that the fact that the group was mostly women had an impact on her, but, with a sneering reference to Marty’s introductory remarks on the first day, said that one man here, “with a feminine side, doesn’t get it.” In the next session (D2-2), Lynn and Marty, the two members most intensely competing for and with the Consultants, ended up sitting on either side of Dr. Tappen.

In these first two sessions of the second day, the competitive themes continued to emerge. As the group attempted to wrestle with how gender might have an impact on the interaction in the group, Lynn focused her anger at Marty. And, even though she was purporting to frame a split (men vs. women), rather than attacking the four men as a
whole, she concentrated her attacking remarks on Marty. The field notes show that it had already been clear to the Consultants and Observers on the prior day that Lynn and Marty were both competing for the attention or authority of the Consultants. And by the end of the second session of Day 2, they were sitting on either side of the senior Consultant in the room.

Through sessions D2-4 and D2-5, the attack on Marty increased and more group members joined in. In an accusatory tone, Lynn asked Marty if talking about his “feminine side” was a strategy to convince the group or the Consultants of something. And Suzanne followed by pointing out to Marty that, unlike the women, he was not facing a glass ceiling (in the corporate world). D2-5 got underway, with Marty inviting the group to “attack if you want, you can’t hurt me.” Patty accused Marty of relying on the books all the time and not taking any risks. The group returned to discussing who should be the leader, with Patrice pointing out that “we’d turn on Lynn” if she tried to lead; several members agreed. Patty then turned to Marty and asked him if he was simply trying to “be like the other groups.” Monica challenged Marty and told him that he was not the only one in the room taking risks. Lynn jumped in and told Marty that he was only taking “safe risks” and accused him of speaking in jargon. Patrice was very worked up by this point, and shifted to face Marty, telling him that she didn’t see this so-called feminine side. “What entitles you to say that?” she asked him angrily. Marty was suddenly in retreat; his physical posture changed and he sat back in his chair, telling the group that he was afraid to take a step here because it was like suicide. Despite this, Monica, Patrice, Lynn, and Leigh continued to criticize Marty’s interaction. Monica even commented that she “did not mean to gang up” on Marty, and expressed bewilderment that the attack continued and included her ongoing involvement. Yet, Monica still joined the others as they critiqued Marty.

Thus, the second day ended with the full brunt of the group attack on Marty – led by and involving many of the women in the group (Lynn, Suzanne, Patty, Patrice, Monica, Leigh). They attacked him for the content and style of his interactions, for relying on the course texts and speaking in the jargon that was the domain of the
Consultants, and for his claims of "understanding" because of his feminine side. Using gender as a topic, the group members attacked to make sure that Marty was unable to single himself out as more enlightened than or more knowledgeable than or more "in tune with" the Consultants than any other member.

The group attack on Marty was rooted in the strong competitive energy in the group, an energy that the group identified early in their process. Lynn and Marty were the clear rivals, either to be the Consultants’ favorites or the Consultants’ replacements (the dependent and counterdependent sides of the proverbial coin). And the group was not going to allow either Marty or Lynn to cross that boundary and separate from the pack in that way. Several members had made their frustrations with Lynn known (e.g., Patty in D2-1 and Patrice in D2-5) — and Lynn subsequently seemed to compete less with the Consultants or the other members. Thus, it appears likely that group attack focused on Marty in large measure for his purported claims to "feminine" authority which the group perceived (as did the Consultants and Observers) as an initial bid for the approval of the female Consultants, and for his reliance on the course texts as a way to please the authority figures. Marty’s statements and behavior reflected both his dependent and counterdependent desires: he sought both the approval of the Consultants and to usurp their authority. His actions demonstrate the principle that individual and group responses can serve more than one function at once — and Marty’s can be seen as both a bid for dominance and a bid for approval.

It is also possible that as one of only two American men, the other group members perceived that Marty was one of the few viable "suitors" for the Consultants (both of whom were American women); thus, it may have been important to destroy Marty’s chances of "wooing" the Consultants and, thus, forging a special relationship perceived to
be unavailable to the rest of the group. What emerges from the data, though, is the clear pattern and theme of competition—and the group’s strong drive to ensure that no one was able to differentiate from and rise above the collective. Ultimately, to quash the competition, the group attacked Marty.

Reinforcing the assertion that competition was an overriding theme in the experience of Group D is a comparison of the field notes across all six Psych 601 groups observed. In the notes from Group D, the word competition or related words (e.g., compete, competing, competitive) appeared 22 times—more uses of the word in my field notes than for all of the other five groups combined. The notion of competing forces or energies within Group D emerged within the group, and was manifest by its preponderant reference in the very notes from the field research.

Thus, there is strong support for the argument that competition was a primary theme for Group D. And, the dynamics of the small group indicate that the group attack on Marty was indeed driven by the simultaneous competition for the attention and approval of the Consultants along with the group’s desire to remove anyone who got too close to the authority figures. The aberrant, non-responsive behavior of the Consultants made them seem unavailable for authority or leadership; but the group was going to attack anyone attempting to establish their own authority which would set them apart from everyone else. Marty’s attempts to align himself with the Consultants in various ways meant that he ended up as the target of the group’s desire to eliminate the competition and of the group attack.

_The Target as the “Designated Patient”_

The third of the perspectives about the ways the groups use group attack as an attempt to establish authority in the room is about how the groups sacrifice a “victim” in
order to compel the Consultant to take action, re-assert authority, and rescue the group
from its perceived structureless chaos. The data demonstrates that the Psych 601 group
members are made anxious by the Consultant’s aberrant behavior, fearful of a world
where the designated authority refuses to lead, and are desperate to get the Consultant’s
attention and nurturing. Some members have tried to be on their best behavior to gain the
Consultant’s approval; others have tried to ignore or eject the Consultant from the group
process. Yet, neither of these strategies was able to rid the group of the anxiety produced
by an aberrantly-behaving authority figure. The group members will, thus, take the
drastic step of attacking and sacrificing one of their members. And, in some cases, those
targeted members take up the designated “victim” status in hopes of pushing the
Consultant to save them – and, by extension, the group – from the existential distress.

Agazarian (1999) writes about this dynamic in therapy groups, saying that “the
group ‘identified patient’ role is created ... [and] offered to the ‘good’ therapist to nurture
and cherish” (1999: 91). In other words, if the group can create a member who is
wounded or ill, perhaps the authority figure will “break role” and provide the nurturing
the group so desperately craves. Turquet (1985) discusses the same idea and talks about
the fact that one of the group-created roles is to be the “casualty,” someone who can
stimulate “the exercise of the leader’s thoughtful expertise in caring” (1985: 359).
Bexton (1975) gives the example of a self-study, Tavistock-type group with architecture
and planning graduate students and writes that a part of the “group scenario involved
offering ‘sick’ members of the group to each consultant to draw out of them the care they
were failing to provide” (1975: 254). And Rice (1975) puts forward that “the group will
... use its own brutality to get the consultant to change his task by eliciting his sympathy
and care for those it handled so roughly” (1975: 102).
Alford (1995a) takes this notion to the level of religious symbolism or significance, and likens the group’s attack and subsequent, designated “casualty” as the key factor in the return of the absent deity (the Consultant):

It is in reality frequently a conflict over who shall be sacrificed first. Because in the end each member, including contestants for sacrificial leader, is waiting for the reemergence and rebirth of the consultant – or therapist – leader, whole and in charge, the murderous aggression that might have torn him or her to pieces having been displaced into the group itself to save him or her. This might be called the primal horde with a Christian coda, members acting as if they believe that if they are harsh enough on themselves the primal father will himself be reborn, as he was not really killed, just put into cold storage for awhile (Alford, 1995a: 139).

Does the self-study group designate a “patient” in hopes that the “reborn” Consultant will step in rescue both the patient and the group as a whole, hoping that the Consultant’s intervention will put an end to their suffering? And will the group go so far as to attack one of their own to create the necessary patient? The group attack data from Psych 601 provides support for this perspective – for the groups created situations where they indeed had “patients” with genuine medical symptoms, and the groups supported those members in their status as patients. Across all six groups observed, there were only three times when group members experienced physical illness. And all three instances involved group members who had been actively marginalized by the group as a whole – and two of those were the specific targets of group attack.

The first participant to become ill was in Group B, when Leah became violently ill almost immediately after she was the target of group attack. In that group attack, Leah had been told by group members that sometimes her comments were not well received and that some had a tendency to “tune her out” because she talked a lot (B2-2, discussed in Chapter 4). As a result, she fled the room, and returned minutes later in tears. During
the next session, Leah cried intermittently during the discussion. In the subsequent sessions, she developed “stomach troubles” and ran in and out of the room to vomit several times. At other points during the sessions, she lay curled up in a fetal position at the Consultant’s feet, moaning softly on occasion. Leah and other group members mentioned her illness repeatedly on the second and third days of the conference — and her illness was used as a means of requiring Consultant involvement and nurturing: Leah pointedly told the group (B3-1) that Dr. Rosen spoke to her and told her she would not fail the course if she missed the movie at the end of Day 2. Thus, not only did Leah’s illness compel the Consultant’s one-on-one, interactive response on Friday, the group was made aware of it again because Leah made it her first comment of the day when Saturday’s sessions began.

It is very clear from the data that Leah placed herself in the role of wounded victim/patient — going to the dramatic extent of lying curled up at the Consultant’s feet. Thus, it is possible to view her behavior as a bid for help from the Consultant — perhaps for protection or some desire to join with the Consultant rather than with the group members who had attacked her. However, there is something else that emerges from the data: no group members made any attempts to alter Leah’s rather dramatic behavior (cf., Wells, 1980, 1985). If anything, the fact that a number of group members repeatedly inquired after her health, interrupted discussions when she moaned, or checked in with her before and after every break indicated the group’s complicity in Leah’s role. While the group never explicitly articulated the fact that Leah was being used to pull the Consultant “out of role,” their behavior speaks volumes. If the other group members had not been willing to tolerate and make use of Leah’s actions, the group-as-a-whole would
have stopped her (cf., Ettin, 1996a, 1996b). Rather than doing so, however, they actively facilitated her status as the wounded “patient.”

The other instance of physical illness manifested in the target of a group attack was in Group F. In that case, similar to Leah’s, Kit also had a stomach-related illness that caused her to vomit (and talk repeatedly about vomiting); this illness was manifested after Kit was herself the target of group attack because of her forceful statement that people who felt they did not have a voice in the group should “get off their ass” (F2-5, discussed above). As with the group attack on Leah followed by Leah’s illness, mention of Kit’s illness and symptoms was scattered throughout subsequent sessions over two days. The group members referred repeatedly to her illness both with seriousness (i.e., compassion for her feelings and well-being) and with humor (e.g., acknowledging that perhaps Kit could not say something at a given moment because it was not safe to open her mouth because maybe more than words would come out, or telling anecdotes about people vomiting out of car windows). In every session following the manifestations of Kit’s illness, the members “checked in” with her to see how she was doing. Group members repeated references to Kit’s illness indicated their distinct level of awareness of her physical health — and their tacit support of her on-going status as the group “patient” following the group attack on her.

Thus, in both of these experiences, the members who became ill with stomach problems and vomiting (Leah and Kit) were the very same members who had been attacked by the group shortly before the symptoms of their illness emerged. This does

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61 I recognize that it is more difficult to point to group-as-a-whole dynamics (Ettin, 1996a; Piper, 1996; Taylor et al, in press; Wells, 1980), but Leah’s illness and the group’s subsequent tacit support of her on-going actions point to a deeper group-based dynamic than a simple, individualistic explanation based on Leah’s solo motivations.
not mean that the physical illnesses were necessarily caused by the group attack, but their manifestations – in terms of the both the individuals and the timing – seem potentially connected to the episodes of group attack of which both Leah and Kit were targets.62

Is there a connection between the group attack and subsequent physical illness? With these specific instances of the group attacks on Leah and Kit followed by the onset of their stomach troubles, it is not possible to say for sure. But, research has demonstrated a clear connection between group dynamics and health. Taylor and her colleagues’ analysis (in press) of casualties in self-study groups cites recent research which supports the existence of this connection:

Smith, Kaminstein and Makadok (1995) asked whether the amount of physical illness among employees was related to organizational dynamics at work. In a study of sixteen subsidiaries of a financial services corporation employing 14,000 people, they found a significant statistical relationship between organizational dynamics operative in the workplace and the number of health problems reported by employees. ... Those who felt discriminated against reported a higher number of health problems than those who did not (Taylor et al, in press).

62 Interestingly, the third instance of physical illness in the groups was not connected to a group attack. In many ways, the situation was almost the opposite: the sick group member, Alicia (Asian-American MBA student), was practically “invisible” to the group for most of the four days. She was one of four Asian women in the group (the others were Pui-Fung, Lorraine, and Antonia). Yet, there are repeated references throughout the entire four days of the conference to the “three Asian women” in the group (multiple references, for example, in sessions F2-3, F2-5, F3-1, F4-3, F4-4, F4-5). No group members ever challenged or corrected this mistake. On the final day of the conference, the Consultant pointed out the error, but it still took a while for the group (including Alicia herself) to discuss Alicia’s virtual invisibility. The only thing the group was able to recall about Alicia over the four days was, in fact, that she had been sick. Other than this, the group had difficulty remembering her presence, even though the treatment of and attitudes toward Asian women in the group had been a very significant topic of discussion across several sessions. Thus, Alicia, even though she was certainly not a target of group attack or hostility – or seemingly of any sort of expressed feelings or reactions – was clearly a marginalized group member. While there were members in other groups who were extraordinarily quiet, none were rendered as effectively invisible for such a sustained period (essentially, almost the entire conference) as Alicia. And Alicia was also the only person other than two group attack targets (Leah in Group C, and Kit in Group F) to have symptoms of physical illness during the conference.
Chapter 5

It is possible, then, to presume some kind of connection between group attack and physical illness. And the sick members did seem to engender particular and notable Consultant responses. In Group C, Leah, for example, lay curled up in a fetal position at Dr. Rosen's feet; and she was effusive in her repeated thanks for the Consultant's "permission" to miss the movie if necessary. While it was Leah whose behavior was the impetus for Dr. Rosen's attention and permission, it was the group as a whole that facilitated Leah's on-going status as a patient enabling Leah to justify reaching out to the Consultant. As such, it is possible to view the attempts to get the Consultant to "break role" as related to an overall group dynamic and not simply as reflections of Leah's motivations on her own.

Similarly, Kit's illness engendered repeated references to her symptoms among a number of group members: they inquired after her health, made suggestions to ease her discomfort, and joked about the consequences of stomach ailments. The discussion and references so prolonged awareness of Kit's status as the group's patient that Dr. Kendall ended up incorporating recognition of her illness into his most lengthy and detailed intervention up until that point in the course (F4-3). In other words, not only did Kit and the group succeed in getting the Consultant to acknowledge the illness and its symptoms, but the intervention which included the reference was the most detailed and directive—and most unlike the stoic Consultant "role."

The examples of the group attacks on Leah and Kit indeed provide support for the perspective that some group attacks take place during the early phases of group life so that the groups will have some kind of "victim" in order to provoke a reaction from the Consultants. And, given the intense focus on the Consultant throughout the first half of

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the Psych 601 experience, it is the group’s hope that this response to a member’s illness will entail the re-assertion of the Consultant’s authority in the life of the group.

In this chapter, then, I have articulated three possible perspectives to help explain why group attack seems to take place during the earlier phases of group life in Psych 601. While there are still tensions and conflicts once the group has done the work of examining the ways they have managed the authority in the group, and then processed the meaning of their behavior, the group interaction of later group events seems somewhat less like the proverbial “being thrown to the wolves” (as one member described it in C4-1). As they continue the group dynamics work in the latter sessions of the course, group members seem more able to deal with each other without engaging in group attack behavior. But, when the authority issues are still palpable and powerful for the membership, and the group perceives that the designated authority is absent or non-responsive, that is when we find the episodes of group attack.
Chapter Six: Group Attack, Gender, and Foreign Identity

I couldn’t believe that two people, two educated people could be so savage and so – so uncompromising.

- John Osborne, Look Back In Anger (1957)

This chapter examines the differential roles played by men and women in the groups during the episodes of group attack, and subsequently looks at the particular feature of some of the international students and their self-protection phenomenon in group attack. As this research began, I would have said that I thought that the group would perceive the male members as a stronger source of danger than the female members. Given that both research findings and popular conceptions support the notion that men are more likely to express anger than women, and that men are typically more aggressive and violent than women, I would have guessed that the men in the group would be the likely leaders of attack behaviors.

The data from this research, however, support a very different conclusion. Across all six groups observed in this study, in virtually every one of the nine instances of group attack identified in the data, it was women who initiated and represented the primary
voices engaged in group attack. Women, in almost every episode of group attack, took the lead in giving voice to group anger or frustration with the selected targets of group attack. Characterized by the group participation nature of the activity, group attack as described in Chapter 4 involves at least three or more members of the group against an individual. And in the research data that comprise this study, the primary attackers were women in the groups.

Gender and Group Attack

A total of six groups were observed and studied for this research, involving a total of 80 different participants, six Consultants, and three Co-Consultants. All of the Psych 601 groups were relatively gender mixed; some groups had even numbers of men and women while other groups had somewhat more women than men (Chapter Three provides the data about the numbers of men and women in each group). Of the six groups observed, three of them (A, B, and D) had female Consultants (Dr. Klein, Dr. Rosen, and Dr. Tappen, respectively); three (C, E, and F) had male Consultants (Dr. Weller for Groups C and E, Dr. Kendall for Group F). Three groups (C, D, and E) also had Co-Consultants (Ms. Greenbaum for Groups C and D, Ms. Berkowitz for Group E); both Co-Consultants were female. And the Observers for five of the six groups (A through E) included both men and women; Group F had only one Observer (a man). Overall then, there was a relatively equal distribution of men and women among both the membership and the staff in each of the groups observed. Thus, it does not appear that the fact that women were the primary instigators and participants in group attack episodes can be explained by looking at simple, numerical majority-minority status in the groups.
Women as the Attackers

In examining the data, there were nine episodes of group attack across all six groups observed. The data can be organized to look at three distinct components or players in the group attack incidents: the target, the initiator, and the supporters. Table 1 below identifies these components for all incidents of group attack.

Table 1: Gender of Initiators and Supporters of Group Attack

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Initiator</th>
<th>Supporters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Allan</td>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Glenda, Karla, Miranda, Benny, Aravind, Gretchen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Annette</td>
<td>Chrissy</td>
<td>Kate, Lou, Martin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>Kate, Annette, Bettina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Ronnie</td>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>Pieter, Mitch, Lana, Jan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Lenny</td>
<td>Ronnie</td>
<td>Jan, Pieter, Karl, Oliver, Mitch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Marty</td>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>Monica, Suzanne, Patty, Patrice, Leigh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td>Leigh, Doreen, Patrice, Patty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Stuart (&amp; Adina)</td>
<td>Hermann</td>
<td>Joyce, Adina, Lai-Fong, Jim, Mary, Veronica, Myra, Saul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kit</td>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Lorraine, Eileen, Pui-Fung, Sharon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 1 shows, five of the group attack targets were men (Marty, Jay, Allan, Lenny, and Stuart). And four of the targets were women (Annette, Leah, Kit, and Ronnie). But, in all situations except for the group attack in Group E, the initiators of the episodes were women.\footnote{The only attack initiated by a man was the attack on Stuart in Group E (initiated by Hermann). Interestingly, this was the only group attack across all six groups that ended with the attacker himself becoming a casualty of the group attack, after Adina’s subsequent retaliatory hysterics about Nazism ended up effectively silencing Hermann for the remainder of the conference.} And, in almost every incident, women were the initial supporters, the first ones to follow the initiator in pursuing the group attack.

Why do women seem to be the leaders in group attack in the context of Psych 601? What is it about the conditions of Psych 601 that would affect who leads episodes of group attack? Alternatively, what is it about the differential roles or attributes of men and women in this context that would influence the fact that women take charge in group attack?

As a result of this research, I argue that there is a particular connection between the context and format of Psych 601 and socially-driven gender roles that may help to explain how it is that women became the primary attackers in the groups. In other words, the goals and format of Psych 601 may privilege women’s interactional styles or strengths as conventionally defined. And, this same course structure and normative context may inhibit some interactional modes more conventionally available to men than to women.

One of the primary goals of the Small Group in Psych 601 is to provide members an opportunity to study their own behavior in the “here and now.” As such, the course places a premium on what is referred to as “emotional literacy” – “an integration of the
individual’s affective experiences with his or her cognitive perspective” (Kuriloff, Babad, & Kline, 1988: 213). In other words, part of the process involves learning about ways to identify one’s emotional responses in the moment and begin to recognize the ways that those responses have an impact on one’s choices and behavior in the group. The Psych 601 course operationalizes this by explicitly encouraging members to give voice to their feelings and talk about how those feelings affect their actions and, consequently, the overall group dynamic.

A wide range of research has asserted that “women are generally more emotionally expressive than men” (Timmers, Fisher, & Manstead, 1998: 976) — that women express their feelings verbally more readily or more easily than men do. As such, women may more readily adapt to the format of the Psych 601 context and make use of the structures intrinsic to emotional literacy and give voice to their emotional experience. When the group attacks take the guise of “giving feedback” or “being honest,” for example, it may be that conventionally-viewed women’s speech provides a strategic advantage for being able to initiate and readily take part in group attack.

Men, on the other hand, may be viewed by researchers to express anger and hostility more directly, more readily, or more frequently than women (e.g., Berdahl, 1996; Gemmill & Schaible, 1991). But, if men’s expression of anger is conventionally defined as more threatening or physical than women’s (cf., Gemmill & Schaible, 1991), then it may be that the format of Psych 601 constrains the ability of men to give voice to anger and rage in some of the socially-prescribed ways for men. In other words, if one of the primary avenues for men to express hostility is through physical action (violence), the fact that violence is inherently taboo for a context such as Psych 601 means that men may be “cut off” from one learned way of manifesting aggressive emotion.
Episodes of group attack among the groups observed provide strong support for this assertion about gender roles in the Psych 601 groups. In addition to those examples of women initiating and driving group attacks discussed in earlier chapters (the attacks on Annette, Leah, Ronnie, Marty, Stuart, and Kit), the group attacks on Jay (in Group D) and on Allan (in Group A) provide additional evidentiary support for the nature of female-led group attacks. Both of these attacks were driven and sustained by the women in the respective groups – and both of the men targeted for attack had, in particular, given voice to a strongly “masculine” gender-role dynamic (i.e., non-emotional, physically imposing presence).

In Group D, women used the notion of “emotional literacy” to launch a group attack targeting Jay, a large, physically-imposing, MBA student who had identified himself in the group’s introductory session as a corporate bond-trader used to the “all-out fighting” of Wall Street. Coming the day after the group attack on Marty (because they said they found his sharing to be “superficial”), women in the group talked about their own emotional responses, and simultaneously pushed and prodded and ultimately attacked Jay in an attempt to force him to acknowledge his own fears and emotions.

As Day 3 got underway, the group discussed the previous day’s attack on Marty. After Jay pointed out that, ironically, the group didn’t even have to have a leader to kill one off, Gwen began to cry. Through her tears, she said that she was carrying anger and frustration toward one particular member of the group and she wanted to tell who and why. She sobbed and said she was angry – “very angry” at Jay, at his manner in the group. You’re very intellectual about everything here, she told him; you don’t give any emotions or show anything to the group. As she saw it, she knew nothing about Jay after two days together. Leigh somberly echoed Gwen’s feelings, saying that she “identified with” what Gwen was saying. In an angry tone of voice, Doreen joined Gwen and Leigh, shouting that she was angry with Jay, too. “I think you’re an asshole. You’ve not given of yourself at all!” she shouted at him. When Jay began to defend himself...
by pointing out that he didn’t have any kids to talk about (as Doreen had done periodically) and then went on to ask Doreen and others what they had really given in the group, Patrice cut him off by saying that she was also angry at him. Patty nodded vigorously as Patrice spoke, and then chimed in that Jay bothered her, too. As Jay sat there, Gwen turned to him and in an emotional voice asked if he was mad about any of this attack. Jay responded by saying that it didn’t really bother him. He said that he couldn’t wait to compete with Harvard and the other business schools once he got to Wall Street; “I’m gonna kill them,” he said with a grin. Saying that he’d been called an asshole many times in his life, he pointed out that contrary to expectations, he was not competitive in the classroom. In response, Doreen shouted “I want to know what you care about, Jay!” Attempting to explain himself, Jay said that he wasn’t really that deep but that he cared about his friends, his family, his health, his job — and said that he was only a mean person when it came to bond trading. As the attacking women continued to cry or shake their heads in disbelief or non-acceptance of Jay’s response, Jay looked around the circle at the entire group, telling them he consciously did not wear his “flat-top and black boots because it scares people.” As the second session of the day began, Jay told the group that before the attack he had thought things were going well. He said jokingly that he had been planning to declare himself the leader and decree that everyone have fun at lunch. “I was completely shocked,” he said. “I toned down for the group, but not enough I guess.”

The group attack on Jay in Group D was initiated and driven exclusively by women in the group. In the guise of “expressing their emotions,” and criticizing Jay for what they perceived as his unwillingness to “open up” with the group, the women in the group attack capitalized on the socially acceptable forms of manifesting anger in the context of Psych 601. And their attack on Jay was predicated on his alleged unwillingness to adapt to some very vocal members’ notion of personal sharing — or what they believed the group sharing should look like.

Jay, meanwhile, gave voice to the notion that men can indeed be scary in some social settings. By his own acknowledgement, he had “toned down” his persona for the context of Psych 601. Not able to rely on more conventional ways for men to express anger and hostility while a target of female-led group attack, Jay articulated the bind that
the men in the group find themselves – and helped to explain how or why men’s participation in group attack is more limited than women’s.

Allan, in Group A, articulated the same kind of bind for men. Like Jay, Allan was also a large, physically-imposing, second-year MBA student; in one small group session, Allan talked about the fact that his response to people trying to take charge was wanting to “strangle somebody.” He said that maybe his violent suggestion was because he grew up in Queens where that was how a guy would respond. Thus, Allan had given voice to his perception: if people make you angry, you want to do them physical harm. But, in this context, he realized that was not an option. In a later session, Allan identified this bind again, when mentioning that he had lots of thoughts about how to deal with frustration in this group, but that his thoughts were “too explosive for here.” As Allan acknowledged after saying this, because he is a big guy used to being forceful, people form strong opinions of him right away. Like Jay in Group D, Allan in Group A was also a target of a group attack led by women in the group.

As the fourth day got underway in Group A, the group discussed issues of race and ethnicity and responses to minority status – although the discussion mostly focused on situations outside the group. Allan spoke his mind about common attitudes toward racial minorities and women, saying that in general he would be more inclined to follow a white man as a leader before anyone else; the group struggled with how to respond. They were angered by what Allan had said, but some acknowledged that the group had given Allan the power to say these things. Session 2 began and the anger of group members at Allan coalesced. Sandra started the session by saying that Allan had better not turn his back toward her now because she was so angry. “I’m shaking with anger,” she said. Maybe it’s just better, she suggested, if Allan stop talking to her for the rest of the course. Glenda followed this by asking members if they even wanted Allan to continue to be a part of their group. Miranda angrily asked Allan if he dealt with situations like this by continuing to make jokes about it. Karla pointed out that she and Sandra and Glenda were no longer willing to deal with Allan – and that this was going to have an impact on the group.
These four women were visibly angry: shouting; pointing; refusing even to look at Allan; Sandra had slammed her notebook closed and crossed her arms in front of her. At this point, two of the men joined in the attack that the four women had been driving. Benny, (Jewish, from Brazil) didn’t like what Allan said — pointing out that he disagreed with Allan’s statements and wondered when Allan would start attacking Jews, too. Aravind (from India) said he was frustrated with Allan’s attitude, even if he already had experience dealing with the same kind of stuff in India. Gretchen said that she didn’t feel like she could continue because of her concerns about Allan — until Ted pointed out that there was a “strong alliance against Allan” to “protect” her so that she could carry on. The session ended with several group members declaring that they would no longer “deal with” Allan.

The group attack on Allan was driven almost exclusively by women. Sandra had initiated it, and Glenda, Miranda, and Karla joined her before two men (Benny and Aravind — both from overseas) joined in. As in the group attack on Jay from Group D, the women found a context-acceptable way to express their anger at a particular member — in this case, the particular member who had given voice to the very dilemma faced by men used to other ways of manifesting anger and hostility. The group attack reached the point at which another white man in the group had to point out that an alliance existed in the room to “protect” members from Allan.

The group attacks on both Jay (Group D) and Allan (Group A) illustrate the way in which women in the group took the lead in both initiating and supporting group attack episodes, a pattern that existed across all six groups. In addition, both attacks demonstrate the ways in which the context and format of Psych 601 could be seen to facilitate the ability of women to lead attack — by privileging communication and interaction styles that are conventionally seen to be areas where women are more comfortable or stronger, and simultaneously handicapping traditional male responses of anger and hostility.
Group Attack and International Students

Most large, prominent research universities attract students from all over the world. Graduate students, in particular, are drawn by the range of opportunities at prestigious research universities such as the one in this study. In addition to all of the anxieties and stresses of beginning a new program of graduate study, students from overseas have to learn the in’s and out’s of the American educational system, make their way through a culture very different from their own, and often navigate all of this in a new language. For some students from overseas – particularly those for whom English is not their native language – it is a real struggle to feel proficient and comfortable in the typical academic setting. Imagine, then, the difficulties that confront international students who enter Psych 601 where the entire experience is a rapid-fire exchange of ideas and feelings – without the familiar structure of a professor’s lecture and question/response interaction pattern.

A key feature of being a student from overseas in the groups was that group members from other countries – particularly those from non-Western countries or cultures – were typically very removed from most of the group attack episodes. A non-Western international student never initiated any of the group attack incidents, these students only rarely took part as supporters in such episodes, and they were never targets of group attack. A recurrent theme throughout all the groups observed was that the students from non-Western cultures or countries were, on the contrary, typically perceived to be silent or virtually invisible – even when there was strong evidence showing that some of them were far from silent and had participated at roughly the same level as other members from the U.S. or other Western cultures.
Across all six groups, there were 15 students from outside the U.S. Of those, nine were from non-Western cultures or countries, as illustrated in Table 2 below. The international students from Western cultures were from countries such as Australia, Canada, Norway, and Germany and all were completely fluent in English. Of the students from non-Western countries, only the two students from India (Aravind in Group A, and Jahangir in Group D) were completely comfortable interacting in English.

### Table 2: Students from non-Western countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Country/Culture of origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Aravind</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Kyung-Mee</td>
<td>Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Yukio</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Saburo</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Jahangir</td>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Michiko</td>
<td>Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Lai-Fong</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>Peru (Quechua tribe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Pui-Fung</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kyung-Mee in Group B was characteristic of many of the non-Western international students. She was a graduate student from Korea; this was her first time studying in a co-ed environment.

Kyung-Mee introduced herself on the first day (B1-1) during a group go-round. As the group members began to talk about their expectations for the course or what they’d heard from students who’d completed it, Kyung-Mee was fairly quiet. Toward the end of the session, Susan asked her a direct question about the things that surprised her about America. Kyung-Mee responded that she cried for four days when she arrived in the U.S. Her voice was powerful and emotional — and she spoke clearly while trying to provide a glimpse into her initial days in this country. The group sat silently during her response. Then, as if Kyung-Mee had never spoken, Leah immediately began to talk about her group experiences with a college advisory group. No one addressed anything Kyung-Mee had said — or responded to her presentation in any way.

The group’s interaction with Kyung-Mee was fairly typical of the way all six groups in this study talked with or listened to non-Western students from overseas. A member of the group would initiate interaction with the international student, the group would sit silently while the foreign student talked, and then the group would continue its interaction as if the international student had never spoken. Most of the time, the group would never even reference the content or emotional tone of what the non-Western member had said. In those instances (e.g., with Yukio in Group D, described below) when the group addressed the subject matter raised by the international student, they would still perceive the member from overseas to have been silent.

Kyung-Mee’s participation on the first day of Group B could be characterized as fairly typical for any group member on day one of Psych 601: she introduced herself, providing a balance of personal as well as academic “status” information, asked questions, expressed discomfort or surprise at what was going on, and otherwise
participated attentively. Yet, it was clear that the group perceived her as being in a
different category from other members. She was the member for whom all interaction
stopped so that someone — unbidden — could take time to inquire after her comprehension
of the subject or explain the rules of a particular group activity.

Kyung-Mee's participation was of the fairly ordinary variety; the field notes show
that she spoke about as often as most other group members, shared personal experiences,
and expressed her frustration with the way things were going in the group. She
articulated a clear preference for smaller groups over larger groups (B3-1) as the group
struggled with the typical issue of whether it would be better to divide up the large group
to make it more "manageable." As the group wrestled with how to deal with the
authority present in the room, Kyung-Mee – like many others – talked about how she
related to authority in her life (B3-4). She shared her frustrations with the Consultant's
perceived inadequacies, saying forcefully (B4-1) that "the group needs leadership." In
spite of all of this participation, the group still seemed to perceive her as silent, but
present. Group members took time to point out that, in contrast to the Consultant, even
though Kyung-Mee does not talk much, "she gives you what you need just by her
presence here" (Annette in B2-1). Later that day (B2-5), Lou asked the group whether
they should "elicit more" from Kyung-Mee, wondering whether the group was "missing
out" on something by not hearing from her.

Looking at the field notes from Group B, it was clear that Kyung-Mee
participated in a fairly typical fashion as a member of the group. Yet, the group
perceived her as silent. When they pointed this out – and explicitly solicited her
additional participation – their words ended up essentially hollow because they would
immediately move on to other speakers or topics. It was as if the group on a conscious
level knew that they should encourage Kyung-Mee’s participation, but after giving voice to their perceived obligation, there was no motivation left for any kind of follow-through. Kyung-Mee did have strongly-accented English and listening to her may have required more effort. But, looking at the field notes, it is difficult to characterize her as “not talking much,” as the group had done.

In the next to last session on the final day (B4-4), the group continued to struggle with how it managed authority in the room. Some members worked hard to identify the ways they handled the Consultant’s role and behavior in the group. As the last few minutes of the session approached, Leah turned to Kyung-Mee to ask her thoughts “about all of this.” Kyung-Mee spoke at some length about her own family and her relationship to her parents and to her siblings. She struggled to make sense of how those relationships affected what she did in the group. As always, the group listened politely and silently. No one interrupted or said anything. Kyung-Mee, though, seemed conscious of not being heard. She ended by asking “Am I outside in this group? Am I a part of what is going on?” As before, no one responded to her questions as the penultimate session ended.

Kyung-Mee had clearly become aware of the fact that the group perceived her as somehow “outside” of what was happening. Instead, the group seemed to envelop her in a kind of bubble. While shielded from any kind of involvement in group attack, she was also rendered marginal or virtually invisible. Despite speaking with some regularity and with clarity and emotion, the group seemed unable even to know that she spoke, let alone to hear what she said. Instead, they indulged in the fiction that she had “powerful” things to say and that they “wished” they heard more from her.

Group D provides an even more striking example of the removal of non-Western students from all aspects of group attack. That group had two students from overseas, both men, both MBA students. Saburo was from Japan; Jahangir was from India. And while Jahangir’s English was fluent and his level of participation fairly high, members of
the group spent much of the time putting him in the same, “silent” category as Saburo. Both Saburo and Jahangir participated with regularity, although Jahangir spoke with much greater frequency and intensity than Saburo. Yet, members made constant references to the “two silent, Asian men.”

On the second day (D2-2), the group discussed how to “get things moving,” and Lynn proposed sharing feelings and discussing them. Leigh pointed out that there’s a fine line between sharing feelings and attacking. Saburo followed Leigh’s observation by saying that he was a very conflict averse person, maybe because of growing up in Japan. Conflict made him uncomfortable, he said, and affected how he acted in the group. Lynn responded by saying that maybe the group needs conflict. As she saw it, there has to be some conflict with 15 people in a room.

Thus, despite the fact that Lynn had indicated quite clearly that she understood exactly what Saburo had said and responded to it using his very words (while Leigh had discussed “attack,” Saburo had been the first to mention “conflict”), the group indicated that they perceived Saburo as particularly quiet. Marty, for example, said that he “needed to hear more” from Saburo and Jahangir. The discussion continued to focus on conflict, and a short while later, Lynn returned the focus to the foreign men and said that she was “envious” because Saburo and Jahangir could be silent.

Thus, even though Saburo had spoken clearly and had labeled a key issue for the group (perceived aversion to conflict and how that might have an impact on behavior), members persisted in perceiving him as silent. Over the next 24 hours, both Jahangir and Saburo participated. In D2-3, Jahangir and Suzanne engaged in a substantial conversation about salary discrepancies between men and women — with Jahangir trying to find some justification or explanation for the fact that women were paid less than men in the school where Suzanne worked. Yet, in the session immediately following (D2-4), Jay started the session with a joke about whether people think “there’s a competition
between Jahangir and Saburo to see who can remain silent the longest.” In D3-2, Saburo talked about how individuals get labeled as leaders – both in the corporate world and possibly in this kind of group. Yet, the field notes from that session simply say “no response to what Saburo says. Is he invisible? Do they even hear him? It seems like the group thinks he’s not there.”

In D3-3, while the discussion addressed how – if at all – group members had differentiated between the Consultant and Co-Consultant (Dr. Tappen and Ms. Greenbaum), Marty turned to Saburo and said that he was frustrated and wanted to hear more from Saburo. In the next session (D3-4), Doreen talked about the assumptions she made about race in the group. To illustrate her point, she indicated the two international students in the room and said that because both are Asian, that’s why they are more quiet. She said that their behavior fit with her “cultural assumptions.” And, at the beginning of the next day (D4-1), she made the same point, stating that she “legitimized” Saburo and Jahangir being quiet because of their cultures.

The data, however, indicate that Saburo and Jahangir were hardly the quietest members of the group. Nor could one even argue that they were the least “personal” or “revealing” in their participation. Monica and Gwen, for example, spoke less frequently than either Jahangir or Saburo – and were usually much more reserved when they did interact with other members of the group. Saburo had, in fact, participated quite regularly and always seemed to be involved in whatever was happening in the life of the group. And Jahangir was an active participant in many conversations – arguing strongly on the first day that the group needs some kind of catalyst, some kind of goal (D1-1). He contended on the second day (D2-4), quite noticeably and forcefully, that the Consultants have no bearing on the group’s functioning – and was a consistent voice of anger and frustration with the Consultants throughout the group experience. He was one of the few group members willing to directly contradict a Consultant’s intervention (D3-5) and was
willing to take the position (D4-1) that gender and race were simply not of interest to him in making sense of the group dynamics. Yet, despite all of this, Gwen and Monica – two of the quieter group members – along with other group members singled out Jahangir as having participated very little in the life of the group. It appears that there was clearly something that prevented a number of group members from hearing or integrating the participation of the students from overseas. Jahangir was an on-going, active participant in group life, yet members regularly referred to the “two” silent Asian men. And while Saburo’s English was far from fluent and, therefore, probably contributed to the inability to “hear” him, Jahangir’s English was both fluent and forceful.

This pattern was the case for all of the non-Western international students in the groups. The most typical response to the participation of these international students was polite courtesy, followed by complete and total indifference. Typical interaction usually involved an international student engaging in a particularly lengthy presentation about their lives or their home cultures or the difficulties of integrating to life in America. This would be followed by a moment of polite silence and then other group members would immediately “shift gears,” switch to a topic completely unrelated to the content of the international student’s participation, and never again address or refer back to the foreign student’s contribution. Even if the non-Western international student tried to engage actively in group life, it was still common for group members to perceive the student as one of the “silent” individuals. In some cases, the students from overseas were actively encouraged to talk more – and then when they did speak, their participation was essentially ignored.

This seeming invisibility takes on an added dimension when considering the phenomenon of group attack. The data from the observations of the Psych 601 group
indicate that the non-Western international students are rendered marginal and generally “outside” the experience of group attack by a combination of two factors:

1. The reluctance of the other group members to do the work involved in listening to and involving people for whom communication in English requires effort, or to do the work involved in integrating and accepting the ideas and input of individuals perceived to have come from a vastly different culture with presumed radically different frameworks for understanding authority, groups, or social interaction.

2. The non-Western students’ use of their own “foreignness” as a form of self-protection.

Data across all the groups show that the groups believed that they “should” be sure to include the participation of the non-Western members from overseas. Yet, even those attempts took the form of “breaks” in the flow of group interaction, after which the group would return to “business as usual,” as if the international student had never spoken. This is not to imply that the group members from the U.S. or other Western nations are inherently biased or prejudicial in their actions. Instead, I believe that the high level of anxiety generated by the experience of Psych 601 makes it all the more difficult for the group to attend to members for whom it is work to be clear and forceful in English. In addition, the group is continuously struggling and working to make sense of the Consultant interventions; thus it may not be as feasible for them to work to interpret and absorb the sometimes difficult accents or syntax of the non-Western foreign members.

Along with this, the group members from Western cultures may have the fantasy that students from non-Western cultures simply do not have the same set of cultural or
social vocabulary or, possibly, the same kinds of experiences with authority or structure or group interaction; as such, the Western students may end up discounting the speech and interaction of those presumed to be very “foreign.” To say that the group members from the U.S. and other Western cultures could be coming from a position of bias would be simplistic. But, even though the groups say that they want to include the input of all members, the assumptions made by students from the U.S. and other Western cultures may end up essentially invalidating or negating the value of the participation of those from cultures which seem to be radically different from their own.

It is also possible to see the dynamics pertaining to students from non-Western cultures as manifestations of ways in which race operates in the small groups. While every one of the six groups observed ended up in detailed discussions of race, ethnicity, gender, and (sometimes) other social identity issues, the consistent response to students from non-Western countries is likely to be yet another way in which the group makes real the racial differences — possibly in a way that ends up feeling less “loaded” or provocative. This possibility seems more likely when examining the fact that these international students were never implicated in the group attack episodes. Their virtual absence as either targets or attackers suggests some kind of inflection or calibration within the group attack process. In other words, it is possible to view the protective “bubble” around the non-Western students as a reflection of the fact that the remainder of the students perceived them or the “issues” they represented as far too loaded or fragile for involvement in group attack. In this way, the group attack phenomenon involves a more nuanced attack, both in choice of target and issues addressed — and the non-Western students were consistently excluded from the fundamental aspects.
Additionally, the behavior and personae of the international students also contributed to or enhanced their isolation and relative remove from the phenomenon of group attack. Support for this assertion comes from the international students themselves. In a number of cases, the non-Western members were able to identify and articulate the fact that their very foreignness made them less involved and, consequently, less vulnerable. Others even acknowledged using the cultural and linguistic divide to their advantage – to protect them from the group’s aggression.

Kyung-Mee (B4-4) questioned why she was “outside” the rest of the group and wondered aloud how she could make sense of this apparent divide.

In Group E, Michiko (from Japan) asked the group why they excluded her from things – including from participation in the group’s conflicts. She asked plaintively if they did not invite her because she is Asian. Or, she asked, was it because of her language abilities? (E4-4).

In Group F, Pui-Fung (from China) acknowledged that she played a role in her own invisibility, saying that she had to take some responsibility, too. She said that she did not stand up for herself in the group. If she had been more vocal the day before, she reasoned, perhaps she would not be so invisible now. She then went on to point out that everyone “jumped on” Kit, and now Kit has stopped talking. So, even if Pui-Fung had rendered herself invisible, she said, at least her invisibility is by choice and not because she was the target of a group attack. (F2-5)

In Group C, Yukio (from Japan) acknowledged that he used the perception of his language skills to his benefit. As part of the discussion about the group attack on Ronnie, Yukio admitted that he used the language barrier to protect himself from attack, saying that it made him safer. (C4-4)

The members from non-Western countries were acutely aware of being separate and apart from some aspects of the group dynamic. And while this isolation may have left them feeling isolated or alone at times, it also provided a measure of protection during the episodes of group attack. As Yukio (Group C) articulated, the international
students seemed to “use” their special status to set up a protective barrier, shielding them from the group attacks. And the barrier seemed to work. The cost of that barrier, created jointly by the international students and the others in the group, meant that the foreign students struggled, perhaps in safety, but doubtlessly under the burden of perceived silence and invisibility.
Chapter Seven: Conclusion

If you have no wounds, how can you know you’re alive?


All of us are familiar with a range of experiences in groups. From families to classrooms to the workplace, we spend a great deal of time studying with, working with, socializing with, and simply being with other people. On a regular basis, we engage in interdependent, face-to-face group interaction with others upon whom we have an influence — and who in turn can have an influence on us. Clearly, there are many benefits — to the individual, to the group, and to the larger society — of experiences in small groups.

At the same time, most of us are aware that some less-than-nice things happen when people gather in groups. All of us can think of times when a group member was the target of ridicule, rejection, attack, or ostracism. These kinds of experiences are not just confined to schoolyard bullying; on the contrary, attacks on a group member take
place within a broad range of group interaction settings, including within families, social
circles, athletic leagues, and professional offices.

While an awareness of the pain-inflicting behaviors of groups is something most
of us share, it was not uppermost in my mind as I began the research for this dissertation.
For me, the process began with an interest in learning more about interpersonal
communication patterns and group processes, particularly as they relate to power and
control in face-to-face settings. I was interested in the ways in which individuals are able
to exercise power in groups, and the strategies used to influence (some might say
"manipulate") group members. How was conversational and interactional control
exercised? What were the processes for establishing or maintaining group norms? It was
with these kinds of questions in mind that I embarked on my initial observations of the
small groups in Psych 601.

During the early round of group observations, however, I began to take note of the
amount of pain being experienced and expressed by group members. Rather than seeing
the issues of power and influence, I was struck by the intensity and expression of pain
and danger in the Psych 601 small groups. In reading more about group dynamics,
discussing the issue with the Psych 601 Consultants and Director, and writing about it in
my journal notes, I pondered the questions of what was causing the pain, and why was it
happening. While still interested in issues of power and influence in face-to-face
settings, I was more and more aware of the fact that it was the actions of the group
members themselves that was leading to the experiences of pain and danger in the room.
It was this increased awareness, then, that led to the formation of my research questions
about the sources, motivations, and manifestations of pain, danger, and attack in group
life.

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I have to admit that as I pondered these research questions, somewhere deep down I hoped that I would help identify ways to stop the pain-inflicting interaction. Like everyone, I had witnessed my share of group situations where someone ends up hurt—and I thought that perhaps this kind of research and exploration could help illuminate ways not only to identify the sources of pain, but perhaps also identify ways one could mitigate or halt it. If this was a naively optimistic hope, it certainly played a role in my interest in the subject. For I saw the pain-inflicting behaviors in the small groups as part of a larger continuum of pain in group life—and somehow connected and on a trajectory with the attacks and pain of social interaction in schools, playgrounds, workplaces, and families.

I recognized, however, that I could in no way make the argument about this connection or continuum based solely on the observations of the Tavistock-type self-study groups of Psych 601. It is difficult enough to make an argument about the generalizability of the Psych 601 groups to other classroom or social groups in the world, let alone to extreme, cruel, or brutal real-world experiences. This crucial question of generalizability, then, is one of the key limitations of this research.

There are, however, some distinctive aspects of the lives and interaction of the Psych 601 groups that do emerge quite clearly from the research. The most central of these observations was the phenomenon of group attack itself. Rather than viewing the episodes as simple extensions of one-on-one conflict, in the context of this research I have conceptualized group attack as a distinct event when three or more group members “gang up” on a particular individual in the group. In this dissertation, I have outlined what I believe are three different (although sometimes concurrent or overlapping) motivations for group attack: projection, displacement, and discarding. In articulating
these three perspectives, I hope to make clearer the uses of the term and notion of “scapegoating” and its particular role in group attack phenomena.

Along with attempting to illuminate concepts and perspectives in making sense of group attack behaviors, this research has also attempted to identify and describe several key features of those group attacks themselves: when they take place, how they take place, and who seems to be most engaged in them.

My research points to the fact that the particular Psych 601 groups that used more violent or attack-related language and metaphors in their initial discussions also had the most intense, extreme, or dramatic instances of group attack behavior across all groups observed. As described in Chapter Four, I did not posit any kind of direct causal relationship, but I do believe that there is some kind of connection, with the group’s language and imagery choices perhaps acting as markers of unconscious emotional states and beacons of dangerous territory or interaction.

In addition, the data from the Psych 601 observations also indicate that group attack events virtually always take place in the first “half” of group life – and based on the data I have argued that this is particularly true because the institutionally-designated authority figure in Tavistock-type groups such as Psych 601 is perceived to be weak, absent, or non-responsive. When groups believe that the authority is not fully “present” – to keep order, provide guidance, or give structure – then the groups themselves seem to become dangerous places and group attack is more likely to take place. In Chapter Five, on the basis of the data from the Psych 601 observations, I concluded that groups appear to use group attack as part of the process of establishing or reinstating the very authority they crave. Thus, the groups “create” transgressors as a means of enforcing group norms to ensure that no one can “stand out” from the collective. In addition, group attacks are
driven by the members’ competition with the authority role of the Consultant. And, groups use group attack to create the role of a “victim” in order to compel the Consultant to assert authority. Through all of this, the timing of the group attack events seems decidedly connected to the group’s relationship to the institutional authority in the room (the Consultant) and to their anxieties about the Consultant’s perceived abdication of authority-related behaviors. Feeling abandoned and adrift, the Psych 601 group members use group attack to establish or reinstate the function of authority in group life.

In Chapter Six of the dissertation, I described the ways in which gender and foreign identity seem to play a role in the phenomena of group attack. If I had been asked prior to this research whether I thought men or women would be more likely to lead aggressive, group attack behaviors, I would have predicted that men were much more likely to be in that role. Yet, the data from the observations of Psych 601 provided a surprising counterpoint to my expectations. In all but one of the Psych 601 group attack situations, the initiators of the episodes were women. Not only did women initiate virtually every instance of group attack observed, but in almost every incident, women were also the initial supporters (i.e., the first ones to follow the initiator in pursuing and extending the group attack). In that Chapter, I concluded that there is a particular connection between the structure and content of Psych 601 and the socially-driven gender roles that helps explain how and why women are the primary attackers in the groups. Thus, it is the goals and format of Tavistock-type self-study courses that privilege conventionally defined women’s interactional styles, strengths, or weaknesses. Likewise, the course structure and normative context may simultaneously inhibit behavioral responses — particularly the use of physical force and strong, aggressive verbal engagement — more conventionally available to men than to women.
In addition to the role of gender in group attack, the Psych 601 observation data also indicated that students from non-Western countries or cultures seem to be rendered essentially invisible — particularly with respect to group attack events. And, while this invisibility marginalizes their perceived participation in group life, it also seems to protect the students from non-Western environments from involvement or implication in group attack episodes.

As mentioned above, there is difficulty, however, in generalizing from the observation of Psych 601 groups to other more naturally-occurring groups or social interaction. Despite this limitation, it is my hope that the patterns and themes observed and described in this dissertation indeed resonate as readers ponder other, more familiar group situations. I have wanted this research to act as a form of magnifying glass to look at particular aspects of small group interaction and give readers a clear, vivid picture that may resonate with them or help them think more intently about small group dynamics — by presenting a clear and compelling description of the phenomenon of group attack.

I view this research as helping raise some questions about the phenomena of attack, pain, and danger in group life. I believe, based on the findings presented in this dissertation, that a valuable next step in this investigative trajectory would be research related to group attack and its manifestations, timing, and “personnel” — in the context of other, more naturally-occurring small group situations. A research program examining, for example, the relationship between initial group language and metaphors and subsequent attack behaviors, or the differing roles of women and men in group attack events — all in the context of a less contrived and more “naturalistic” small group setting — would help illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of the conclusions presented in this dissertation.
I believe that the data and findings presented here raise some interesting and important philosophical questions with significant implications. The potential connection between attack-related imagery in initial group interaction and the intensity or extremity of subsequent group attack could carry significant meaning with respect to societal debates about the nature, importance, and power of workplace harassment and "hate speech," for example. Findings about the relationship between perceptions of authority's strength and "presence," for example, could resonate with implications about a range of social interactions (such as in school settings) and the nature and timing of institutional controls imposed. And, observations about the contextual conditions which may facilitate or inhibit group attack as driven by women or alternatively by men may help illuminate broader social issues in the possible differential relationships of gender, attack, and aggression. I do not and cannot make arguments about the policy or societal implications of these observations in the context of this dissertation. But, as I have been immersed in the data and literature about the issue, I have recognized that the potential applicability of these findings beyond the confines of Tavistock-type groups such as Psych 601 would be a significant contribution to our understanding of communication and social interaction in small groups.

As mentioned above, once I became aware of the existence and nature of the attack-related pain and danger in the lives of the Psych 601 groups, I had hoped to think about ways to "soften the blow" and make group life "safer" and easier for all participants. This research, however, has made me begin to question the possible simplicity of that position. Much as I would like to believe that groups can exist without hurting their own members, I have also begun to realize the possibly central role of attack and pain in the group life.
Some education theorists looking at child development and classroom culture have argued that teachers and other authority figures may need to stay out of many childhood fights, arguing that ostracism and exclusion of others may simply be a necessary part of growing up and of human interaction (e.g., Goodman & Lesnick, 2001). And other researchers have argued that perhaps there is an inevitability to the phenomena of “bullying” and “ganging up” – from the classroom to the boardroom to the broader society or nation (cf., Nansel, et al, 2001). I do not accept the notion, however, that this means that this behavior must, consequently, be passively accepted. Instead, I am more and more convinced that our response must be to continue to examine the role of attack-related pain and danger in our groups, looking at how we as individuals and members of groups are complicit in or benefit from group attack (either directly or indirectly) in a variety of settings and in a variety of ways. As Marvin and Ingle (1999) posit concluding their discussion of the societal role of violence and war, “The question is never how to get rid of violence, but which set of killing rules we will submit to” (1999: 313). This dilemma is, I believe, one of the realities of civilized societies attempting to make sense of or respond to group attack.

The notion of having to accept a set of “killing rules” at all may not satisfy some who, like me, have looked for ways to make the group interaction safer. It is certainly true that the data from my dissertation research provide support for the argument that group attack may play a significant role in the lives of small groups – at least in those Psych 601 self-study groups that formed the basis of this research. My research does not lead me to see group attack as an inevitability about which nothing can be done, however; instead, I have begun to view it as a part of the framework of group interaction that must be recognized and explicitly addressed. The very process of questioning and labeling and
examining the pain-inflicting attack behaviors may help us acknowledge their potency and role — and perhaps help us someday identify alternative ways to harness the attack powers of the group. I would like to believe that it is possible for applied social science research to act as a catalyst for more activist endeavors — inspiring others to apply theory and data to questions of social policy and to the pursuit of social change (Zimbardo et al, 2000). At the same time, I also recognize that the somber query of the character of The Man in Albee’s *Play About The Baby* reflects the fact that indeed we must wonder whether it is truly our wounds that let us know we are alive.
Appendices

Appendix 1 — Charge Sheet

PSYCHOLOGY 601

Dr. John Green, Director & Consultant
Ms. Jane Brown, MBA, Co-consultant

Dr. Susan White, Consultant
Mr. Tom Black, M.S., Co-consultant

Dr. Ellen Rose, Consultant

The Primary Purpose of the Course:
The primary purpose of the course is to provide students with opportunities to learn about the dynamics of working groups. This includes studying the nature of authority and responsibility, communications, the uses of power, the evolution of roles and norms, and the underlying assumptions which often govern small group behavior. It also includes studying how various social identities and intergroup dynamics affect group behavior.

The Small Group:
The task of the small group is to further the primary purpose of the course by providing opportunities for members to study their own behavior in the here and now.

The Intergroup Event:
The task of the intergroup event is to further the primary purpose of the course by providing members with opportunities to compare and contrast their experiences with those of members of other groups. The focus is then and there.

The Thematic Event:
The task of the thematic event is to further the primary purpose of the course by providing members with opportunities to examine how specific issues play out in groups. The issues will be selected by the staff prior to the event, based on their assessment of current conference themes.

The Small Task-Group:
The task of the Small Task-Group is to further the primary purpose of the course by giving members the opportunity to study how group dynamics affect, and in turn are effected by the existence of a clear, unambiguous task, a deadline, and an evaluation procedure which rewards effective collaborative behavior.

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The Consultant Staff Meeting:
The task of the consultant staff meeting is to help staff members understand the
development of the conference, so they may further the learning of the students.
Generally, the focus will be on the then and there. From time to time, when it becomes
important to the staff’s learning about issues in the conference, a here and now focus may
also be appropriate. It is the responsibility of the Director to decide when the focus
should be here and now versus then and there.
Appendices

Appendix 2 – Sample Conference Schedule

Schedule of Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00 – 10:00 AM</td>
<td>Introduction (Room 409)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 – 10:50 AM</td>
<td>1st Small Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:50 – 11:20 AM</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Staff meet in Room 223 to report out)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Students: 15 min. for journal writing, 15 min. free time)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:20 – 12:10 PM</td>
<td>2nd Small Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:10 – 12:30 PM</td>
<td>Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 – 1:50 PM</td>
<td>Lunch (Faculty meet; Psych 701 meet separately)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:50 – 2:40 PM</td>
<td>3rd Small Group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:40 – 3:10 PM</td>
<td>Break</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:10 – 4:10 PM</td>
<td>Intergroup</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Faculty works together)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:10 – 4:30 PM</td>
<td>Break (Staff: report by Psych 701 students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30 – 5:20 PM</td>
<td>4th and Final Small Group for the day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:20 – 5:30 PM</td>
<td>Break (for Staff)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30 – 6:30 PM</td>
<td>Staff Meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brief summaries by (co)Consultants:
- Problems (attendance, lateness)
- Developmental stages with evidence
- How did members treat each other?
- How did members treat Consultant/Director?
- Themes.
**FRIDAY**

8:30 – 9:00 AM  
Arrival Time – Coffee and breakfast rolls (Room 409)

9:00 – 9:50 AM  
1st Small Group

9:50 – 10:20 AM  
Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)

10:20 – 11:10 AM  
2nd Small Group

11:10 – 11:40 AM  
Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)

11:40 – 12:30 PM  
3rd Small Group

12:30 – 12:50 PM  
Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)

12:50 – 2:10 PM  
Lunch (Faculty meet; Psych 701 meet separately)

2:10 – 3:00 PM  
4th Small Group

3:00 – 3:30 PM  
Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)

3:30 – 4:30 PM  
Thematic Event (701 students observe; faculty works together)

4:30 – 5:00 PM  
Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)

5:00 – 5:50 PM  
5th Small Group

5:50 – 7:10 PM  
Movie for Psych 601

Evening Debrief for Staff:
Brief summaries by (co)Consultants:
- Problems (attendance, lateness)
- Developmental stages with evidence
- How did members treat each other?
- How did members treat Consultant/Director?
- Themes.
### SATURDAY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30 - 9:00 AM</td>
<td>Arrival Time – Coffee and breakfast rolls (Room 409)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 - 9:50 AM</td>
<td>1st Small Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:50 - 10:20 AM</td>
<td>Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:20 - 11:10 AM</td>
<td>2nd Small Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:10 - 11:40 AM</td>
<td>Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:40 - 12:30 PM</td>
<td>3rd Small Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 - 12:50 PM</td>
<td>Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:50 - 2:10 PM</td>
<td>Lunch (Faculty meet; Psych 701 meet separately)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:10 - 3:00 PM</td>
<td>4th Small Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00 - 3:30 PM</td>
<td>Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:30 - 4:30 PM</td>
<td>Thematic Event (701 students observe; faculty works together)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30 - 5:00 PM</td>
<td>Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 - 5:50 PM</td>
<td>5th Small Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:50 - 7:10 PM</td>
<td>Movie for Psych 601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evening Debrief for Staff:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brief summaries by (co)Consultants:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Problems (attendance, lateness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Developmental stages with evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How did members treat each other?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How did members treat Consultant/Director?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Themes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**SUNDAY**

8:30 – 9:00 AM Arrival Time – Coffee and breakfast rolls (Room 409)
9:00 – 9:50 AM 1st Small Group
9:50 – 10:20 AM Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)
10:20 – 11:10 AM 2nd Small Group
11:10 – 11:40 AM Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)
11:40 – 12:40 PM Intergroup (Psych 701 observes; faculty works together)
12:40 – 1:30 PM Lunch (Faculty worktime)
1:30 – 1:40 PM (10 minutes for Psych 701 report)
1:40 – 2:30 PM 3rd Small Group
2:30 – 3:00 PM Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)
3:00 – 3:50 PM 4th Small Group
3:50 – 4:20 PM Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)
4:20 – 5:10 PM Final Small Group
5:10 – 5:25 PM Break (Staff – work; Students – journal)
5:25 – 6:25 PM Question and Answer (and room clean-up)
6:30 – 7:30 PM Final Staff Meeting

Brief summaries by (co)Consultants:
- Problems (attendance, lateness)
- Developmental stages with evidence
- How did members treat each other?
- How did members treat Consultant/Director?
- Themes.

**LOCATIONS OF MEETINGS**

- Consultant meetings will take place in the Director’s office.
- Consultant and Observer meetings will take place in Room 223
- Advanced Group meetings will be arranged.
- The intergroup events, movies, and refreshments will be held in Room 409.
- The location of the Thematic Events will be announced in Room 409.
Appendix 3 — Sample Informed Consent

Informed Consent Agreement
Psych 601, Small Group Processes

I have read the course description for Psych 601, and have listened to what the Director said about it. I understand that the course is an academic inquiry into the social psychological dynamics of small groups and is not group psychotherapy. I understand that in addition to readings, papers, and mini-lectures, the course involves a major experiential component, in which students are asked to study their own behavior, in the present, and that the role of the consultants (instructors) is to intervene when they believe they can foster participants' learning. I understand that this experiential approach may cause some anxiety and stress, especially during the first day or two, as students get used to this new way of learning.

By signing this agreement, I acknowledge that I have been asked to read material which explains the process of this course and that this material has been further explained by the Director. Further, I acknowledge that I am currently not undergoing any undue stress that might compound the ordinary stress of the course. That means, for example, that I have not lost a loved one recently, that I am not in the process of breaking up with a lover or a spouse, suffering from a serious illness, or taking psychopharmacological drugs for the treatment of a psychiatric illness. If I am in psychotherapy, I have discussed Psych 601 with my therapist, and both of us have agreed it is appropriate to take it at this time. If I have a history of psychiatric disorder, I have discussed taking the course at this time with my therapist and will confer with my consultants (i.e., instructors) prior to the first small group session.

I have read this letter. I will discuss with my instructors any uncertainties I have about the stress I am currently under prior to beginning the first small group session. I understand the nature of the course, have conformed to the requirements for discussion and disclosure laid out in this letter and in the course syllabus, and enter into the course understanding that it is an academic experience.

Finally, I have understood the confidentiality requirements of the course; I may say anything I like to anyone about my own experience. I may also say anything I like about the consultants (instructors). However, I will neither mention the name nor describe the behavior of any member of my small group to anyone outside the membership of the small group (except when appropriate to further the learning in the intergroup events). Nor will I discuss anyone from the other small groups outside the course. I understand the instructors (consultants) will only discuss members of their small group and members of other small groups in so far as it furthers the learning in the conference or is necessary as defined by the American Psychological Association Guidelines for Ethical Conduct.

Signed: _____________________ Date: _____________________
### Appendix 4

**List of Small Group Members and Consultants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROUP A</th>
<th>GROUP B</th>
<th>GROUP C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultant: Dr. Fine</td>
<td>Consultant: Dr. Rosen</td>
<td>Consultants: Dr. Weller, Ms. Greenbaum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members:</td>
<td>Members:</td>
<td>Members:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Allan</td>
<td>1. Annette</td>
<td>1. Alissa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Frank</td>
<td>5. Kyung-Mee</td>
<td>5. Jan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13. Ronnie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14. Saul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15. Yukio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GROUP D
Consultants:
Dr. Tappen
Ms. Greenbaum

Members:
1. Doreen
2. Gwen
3. Jahangir
4. Jay
5. Leigh
6. Lynn
7. Marty
8. Monica
9. Patrice
10. Patty
11. Saburo
12. Suzanne

GROUP E
Consultants:
Dr. Weller
Ms. Berkowitz

Members:
1. Adina
2. Albert
3. Cynthia
4. Hermann
5. Joyce
6. Lai-Fong
7. Mary
8. Michiko
9. Myra
10. Patrick
11. Sam
12. Stuart
13. Veronica

GROUP F
Consultant:
Dr. Kendall

Members:
1. Alicia
2. Antonia
3. Barbara
4. Denise
5. Eileen
6. Elsie
7. Emily
8. Georgia
9. Kit
10. Larry
11. Lorraine
12. Luis
13. Nachshon
14. Pui-Fung
15. Sharon
16. Tony
17. Vince
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