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CAN AN INDIVIDUAL GET LOST IN A GROUP?

**AN EXPLORATION OF GROUP THEORY AND ITS
APPLICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF WIDER SOCIETY**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to investigate group dynamics that may arise at a Tavistock-style group relations conference. An attempt has been made to explore the experiences of the individual member and interpersonal dynamics in a small and large study groups. The aim of the research was to identify whether individuality is compromised when an individual participates in a group. The research looked at unconscious processes that guide the dynamic of both small and large groups. The question of whether or not an individual loses oneself in a group was explored, taking into account Bion's basic assumptions theory and further group assumptions made by subsequent theorists. The research identified that two opposite group assumptions may arise. Turquet's basic assumption Oneness suggests that an individual merges with the group in a situation that denies differentiation of the members at an emotional level. Lawrence, Bain and Gould suggested otherwise – that basic assumption Me-ness prevents the formation of the group in an attempt to preserve the member's individuality. These two opposing ideas were applied in the context of understanding the dynamics of modern society and the rise of nationalism.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

All humans exist as members of different groups. When they are born, they take on membership of the family system, their first group, and as they go through life they will join different types of groups with different tasks and characteristics. According to Bion (1961), individual behaviour should be interpreted with in relation to other individuals and in relationship to the group. With this idea in mind, one should consider the extent of the influence that others have on the behaviour of an individual, and how the individual influences the behaviour of the group in which they are a member.

Freud explored the notion of a group through his critical analysis of Le Bon's famous work *Psychologie de foules* (Freud, 1921). In his work, Le Bon wrote about the mind of the group and what is it precisely that unites the group. He also believed that individuals in a group display characteristics that would not have been previously present. Freud raises the following questions in relation to what exactly the 'group' is and how much influence it has on the mental life of an individual (Freud, 1921);

- Is there a presence of a collective group mind?
- What is necessary for strong bonding of all individual members of the group so that they form a group?

Bion proposed a broad question – what is a group? He believed that the characteristics of the individual cannot be understood unless one looks at the individual person as a 'herd animal' (Bion, 1961). Each individual is part of some form of group, and human behaviour should be

interpreted keeping in mind the existing relationships between individuals. Bion believed that looking at the group changes the field of study and uncovers characteristics that would not otherwise be discovered (Bion, 1961).

The aim of this research is to identify whether individuality is compromised when one participates in a group. The objectives of the research are as follows:

- Explore the dynamics of small and large groups and their respective effect on the individual with regard to the loss of 'individuality'
- Explore whether those group dynamics can be applied to the understanding of group organisation in wider society

'Individuality' is defined by the Collins Dictionary (online) as "the qualities that distinguish one person or thing from another". It is with this definition in mind, that this research seeks to;

- Explore whether the membership of a group forces the individual to conform to the standards imposed by the group and;
- Identify whether their behaviour loses a quality that distinguishes them from other members of the group.

Bion believed that the struggle of the individual to preserve his individuality in a group situation is strongly influenced by the state of mind of the group as a whole (Bion, 1961). He wrote:

The individual is a group animal at war, not simply with the group, but with himself for being a group animal and with those aspects of his personality that constitute his 'groupishness'. (Bion, 1961, p. 131)

This research will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter will explore the experience of an individual in both small and large groups, in the context of a Travistock-style group relations conference. Such an event is set up with 'alternating groups' – seminars that alternate between small and large groups. The chapter seeks to explore the theory available on both small and large groups, taking into account the individual experience and group dynamics.

The second chapter will ask the following questions:

- Having considered the theory available on groups, is it true to say that individuals can lose themselves in a group?
- Is there any anxiety attached to the membership of a group?
- Would certain group situations contribute to the loss of individuality more than others?

The third chapter will attempt to apply the dynamics found in small and large groups in the context of wider society. Specifically, the author will look at the threat of the loss of national identity within the context of modern politics and the rise of nationalism. It is hoped that this will outline an example of how the theory can be applied to provide a better understanding of contemporary society.

CHAPTER 2 – INDIVIDUAL IN A GROUP RELATIONS CONFERENCE

A Travistock-style group relations conference was established in order to apply psychoanalytical research to the practicalities of everyday life (Shapiro et al., 2012). The structure of the conference is based on the work of Wilfred Bion (1961). While conducting group therapy, he established that there is a connection between what individual members are doing and saying and the behaviour of the group-as-a-whole. Based on this, he developed a theory that aims to explore the dynamics between the individual and the group (Shapiro et al., 2012). The conference is divided by alternating small and large groups in order to facilitate the learning of the participants.

Shapiro et al. identified three major psychoanalytic concepts used throughout the duration of the conference. They recognised a basic notion of unconscious functioning – “we are all moved about in life by much that is internal to us, but our awareness both as individuals and in groups” (Shapiro et al., 2012). They further proposed that the unconscious functioning comes through transference and counter-transference¹ and the use of projective identification².

¹ Transference refers to the ways in which our internalised images of others, usually derived from the childhood experiences, recreate familiar relationships. Counter-transference refers to unconsciously derived reactions to being seen as someone who we don't think we are (Shapiro et al., 2012)

² Projective identification is a concept developed by Melanie Klein, which refers to the way we unconsciously attempt to coerce others to become the people we need them. This occurs both between individuals, and within and between groups. (Shapiro et al., 2012)

There are three levels on which group learning occurs. Firstly, there is a heightened irrationality in the behaviour of individuals as they are faced with authority. Secondly, there is an “ability to recognise group functioning and see the ways in which conscious efforts toward collaborative work can be hampered by irrational thinking on the part of group members” (Shapiro et al., 2012). Finally, there is a shift toward new ways of thinking. It is proposed that the members can discover “a capacity to doubt the validity of perceptions which seem unquestionably true” (Palmer, 1979, as cited in Shapiro et al., 2012). This new way of thinking requires the development of capacity for both involvement and detachment.

Shapiro et al. proposed that one of the tasks of the staff of a group conference is to be dependable – this can support the members’ feeling of security and will allow them to cope with the anxiety, aggression, confusion and new learning (Shapiro et al, 2012). The group conference can pose lack of familiarity to its members. Through the process of containment³, staff members can provide the participants with an opportunity for learning. It was proposed that if the staff members attempt to unfold the group process without focusing on individuals, the members can feel ignored and they can perceive the group experience as stressful and ungenerous (Shapiro et al., 2012).

The primary task of a group relations conference is to provide an opportunity to study authority and leadership. Shapiro et al. proposed that each member of the conference will be faced with diverse tensions. There will be a sense of confusion present, as the members might be unsure

³ Containment is a process developed by Bion, in which an entity hold anxiety-ridden aspects of experience within itself, allowing the chaotic experience to be converted into independent thinking (Shapiro et al., 2012)

what they should be talking about. They will attempt to establish connections with the staff members, while the consultants ignore the individuals and only address the group as a whole (Shapiro et al., 2012). The experience takes place during specific events – these include small study group, large study group and inter-group events.

It was suggested that over time the group will begin to share unconscious assumptions. The concept of basic assumptions was developed by Bion – he believed that they are inherent in the life of all groups. He believed that group members contribute to basic assumption behaviour without being aware of doing so (Miller, 1997). He argued that such behaviour is “instantaneous, inevitable and instinctive” (Bion, 1961, p. 153). He recognised the presence of valency – “a capacity for instantaneous involuntary combination of one individual with another for sharing and acting on basic assumption” (Bion, 1961, p. 153).

The unconscious level of the group is held together by a shared assumption of the group task and the members’ contribution to it. Bion recognised the presence of three basic assumptions (ba): fight/flight⁴, dependency⁵ and pairing⁶ (Bion, 1961). Bion argued that at least one basic assumption is always present in a group. Basic assumptions often distract the members from the task of the group. Bion developed a concept of group culture, which may show conflict

⁴ In ba fight/flight, the group behaves as if its purpose is to identify an enemy or threat, which the group must either attack or flee from (Miller, 1997)

⁵ In ba dependency, the group expects to be fed and nurtured by an omnipotent and omniscient leader (Miller, 1997)

⁶ In ba pairing, the group hoped for a union of two members which will produce the future leader, the messiah, who will provide salvation. The emotional state of the group is one of expectancy and hope (Miller, 1997)

between the individual's desire and the group mentality. He believed that the presence of the group culture will always show the evidence of underlying basic assumptions (Bion, 1967).

A part of the group relations conference is the exploration of the individual behaviour in a large study group. McMillan (1981) suggested that large groups represent a very primitive situation to new members. She proposed that while a small group may have elements of a family setting and may act as a container for transference of familiar relationships, the large group may at first bring back the memory of the stage of infancy before family members are recognised and “the world is in perceptual confusion” (McMillan, 1981).

For an individual, a large group situation can be “an amorphous mass of others where one-to-one relationships are difficult to establish and maintain” (McMillan, 1981). It is frequent for the individuals to feel isolated and hopeless as they are unable to understand or encompass the total group. McMillan proposed that the anxiety of large group situation may lead group members to regress to primitive forms of defence – the myth⁷ of unknowability of society may act as a filter to save group members from facing complexity and variety in the group (McMillan, 1981).

Anzieu (1984) pointed out three reasons why the study of large groups is interesting. He proposed that unconscious psychical processes are marked more strongly compared to those in

⁷ According to McMillan, a myth is a shared assumption about the way reality operated in a group setting. She quoted Bion in proposing that myths from a group mentality and act as “*a mode of knowing and affirmation of being*” (McMillan, 1981)

small group, and their role and function become more easily understandable. He also pointed out that in a social setting, large groups are more common than small groups, therefore a better understanding of the group unconscious can be acquired. Finally, he believed that in a large group, regression is generally carried out farther than in individual analysis or in a small group (Anzieu, 1984).

Anzieu recognised that membership in a large group can pose a danger of losing one's personal identity – he believed the members may feel drowned in collective anonymity. It is because of the large number of people present and the constraint of time, they cannot create inter-individual relationships that allow them to feel they exist (Anzieu, 1984). The participant may also have a negative reaction to the group of monitors – they may feel the monitors are indifferent. They may feel that other participants are potentially dangerous and aggressive. There is a fear that they are “doomed to an ephemeral collective experience” (Anzieu, 1984, p. 73). Anzieu pointed out a contrast between the group participants and the monitors – the group is small, lasting, consists of mutual friendship and guarantees personal experience. The team of monitors has all the characteristics that the participants of the large group are lacking (Anzieu, 1984).

Anzieu proposed that the most common way in which the participants verbalise their experience of the group is through the unconscious phantasy of breaking apart (Anzieu, 1984). He believed that the participants of a large group exhibit an anxiety that their personality will fragment – that it will be torn apart or devoured. He also suggested that participants of the large group may fear that if they speak out, they will be “devoured” by the other members of the group. He supported that by pointing out that generally when a participant speaks out in a large

group, they are criticised and attacked. Anzieu stipulated that the participants fear that if they open their mouths, it will be interpreted by the others as wanting to bite, and that in turn may provoke the others to bite back (Anzieu, 1984).

Anzieu attributed the difficulty of not knowing others in a large group to the perceived danger of losing one's ego identity. He made reference to the work of Melanie Klein when exploring this phenomenon – he believed that everyone in a large group, including the monitors, has what Klein called psychotic anxiety (Anzieu, 1984). He identified that as “depressive persecutory anxiety, collective, affective currents running through the group” (Anzieu, 1984, p.74). Bion had a similar understanding with regard to the presence of basic assumptions within the group – he wrote “basic assumption phenomena appear ... to have the characteristics of defensive reactions to psychotic anxiety” (Bion, 1961, as cited in Miller, 1997).

Shapiro et al. (2012) proposed that for learning to occur during the group relations conference, there is a pressure on each member to “give up aspects of his or her individuality, identify and merge with the group, both to grasp the consultant's interventions and connect with other members” (Shapiro et al., 2012). This collective surrender to the learning will generate an interpretable group dynamic. They proposed that by the end of the conference, the members will have had the experience of regressing into joining a group. This will allow them to experience “the irrational, group influenced responses to designated leadership and authority” (Shapiro et al., 2012). They also proposed that all conferences are, to a certain degree, a reflection of the social context in which they take place.

CHAPTER 3 – CAN AN INDIVIDUAL GET LOST IN A GROUP?

Wolf et al. (1993) proposed that all groups designed for therapeutic purposes must encompass all levels of group functioning, with the ultimate work being done on an intrapsychic level. This is because it is the individual, not the group, that is seeking treatment within the group situation. They believed that consciousness lies inside the individual, not the boundaries of the group. An individual can participate in an interpersonal dyad, group dynamic or even “turn himself over to a group-as-a-whole process” (Wolf et al., p. 19).

Freud believed that it is possible for an individual to lose its identity within a group setting. He wrote:

the intense emotional ties which we observe in groups are quite sufficient to explain one of their characteristics – the lack of independence and initiative in their members, the similarity in the reactions ..., their reduction ... to the level of group individuals (Freud, 1921/2001, p. 117)

Kernberg (1980, as quoted in Wolf et al., p. 19) explained the process where an individual member can lose a part of the ego in the group. He proposed that the projection of the ego ideal into the leader of the group, who may be idealised by the group, eliminated individual moral constraints as well as the higher functions of self-criticism.

Kernberg believed that an individual in a group may be exposed to a pull towards loss of their identity (Kernberg, 1980, as quoted in Wolf et al., p. 19). He pointed out a presence of enormous regressive pull in groups. He wrote:

Groups processes pose a basic threat to personal identity, linked to a proclivity in group situations for the activation of primitive object relations, primitive defensive operations and primitive aggression with predominantly pregenital features. (Kernberg, 1980, as quoted in Wolf et al., 1993, p. 20)

When group therapists choose to ignore the internalised object relations of the individuals and concentrate solely on group-level phenomena, they may intensify the regressive pull of the group. This can cause the members to merge together as they attempt to cope with the situation. What might appear as the group being cohesive is in fact the loss of individuals' ego functions (Wolf et al., 1993). On the other hand, groups in which the therapist misinterprets group-as-a-whole phenomena on a regular basis carry some potential risks for the individuals. They may "comply mindlessly with a force they believe to be greater and outside of themselves" (Wolf et al., 199, p. 26). A group of compliant members is not an optimal space for personal development. Such type of group may cause the participants to "lump together and begin to speak as though they are not unique" (Wolf et al., 1993, p. 27)

In exploring individuality within a group setting, it is important to look at the fourth and fifth basic assumptions – Oneness and Me-ness. Bion's work regarding the processes fuelling a group situation have changed the way people look at groups. He described the individuals in a group as unconsciously cooperating in a few characteristics – repeating the same patterns that may give an impression of them sharing the same basic assumption of their purpose in the group (Hatcher Cano, 1998). Bion's work inspired others to look at groups beyond three basic assumptions developed by him. These include Pierre Turquet's fourth basic assumption "Oneness" (1974) and a fifth basic assumption "Me-ness" described by W. Gordon Lawrence, Alistair Bain and Laurence Gould (1996).

The premise of basic assumption Oneness (baO) is that the members of a group seek to “join in a powerful union with an omnipotent force” or “to be lost in oceanic feelings of unity” (Turquet, 1974, as quoted in Hatcher Cano, 1998, p. 84). On the other hand, basic assumption Me-ness (baM) assumes that there is no group at all – “just unaffiliated individuals, whose only joint purpose will be to thwart the formation of the group out of fear that they might be submerged in it or persecuted by it if it did form” (Hatcher Cano, 1998, p. 84).

Turquet believed that some large groups may have a tendency to level all of the members as equals. He proposed that this denial of differentiation may appear in early stages of group formation and this denial “sets the stage for unconscious collusion” which presents itself in the form of basic assumption oneness” (McMillan, 1981). Basic assumption Oneness denies differentiation of the members at an emotional level. It creates an assumption that all members, with an exception of a leader or a pair, are emotionally equivalent and their identity is derived from their surrender of uniqueness, and then they can act out the requirements of the group (McMillan, 1981).

McMillan identified a number of functions that baO may hold in a group situation. She proposed that without it, other basic assumptions of Bion would not arise. She wrote “Oneness enables the group to act together as a dependent, or in fight/flight mode, or together to eagerly await the results of pairing” (McMillan, 1981).

McMillan suggested that Oneness may affect the decision making in the group. Cohesive forces may cause the loss of individual role identity. There may be an assumption that the members of the group should and must act as one, so that they can avoid the dangers of division and hostility – this can be apparent in the phenomenon of ‘group think’⁸ (McMillan, 1981).

Lawrence, Bain and Gould argued that in a group mentality, an individual may regress and temporarily get caught up in a primitive splitting, projective identification, depersonalisation and infantile regression (Lawrence, Bain, Gould, 1996). As mentioned in chapter one, Bion identified three patterns in which individuals in a group may behave. These three basic assumptions of dependency (baD), fight/flight (baF/F) and pairing (baP) are part of group mentality. Bion’s theory demonstrates that each basis assumption provides a different emotional experience.

Lawrence et al. described how the actions of basic assumptions may have a destructive effect on the members’ individualities. In basic assumption dependency, the individual becomes more deskilled as information on realities becomes less available – the members become reliant on the all-powerful leader. In basic assumption pairing, the members of the group share a collective hope of a creation of a Utopia, that will solve all their problems of existence. In basic assumption fight/flight, the individual becomes less important – the preservation of the group

⁸ “Groupthink” is a phenomenon proposed by Janis, which he explained as *“a quick and easy way to refer to a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in group, when members striving for unanimity override their motivation for realistically appraise alternative course in action”* (Janis, 1972, as quoted in McMillen, 1981)

is at the forefront. Lawrence et al. argued that this culture is anti-intellectual and will halt any behaviour attempting to reach self-knowledge (Lawrence et al., 1996).

The description of the existence of basic assumption Oneness (baO) by Turquet suggested that the group may take over the identities of its members. He wrote “the group member is there to be lost in the oceanic feelings of unity, if the oneness is personified, to be a part of a salvationist inclusion” (Turquet, 1974, as quoted in Lawrence et al., 1996). This idea suggests that once the group is formed, the individuals transform from ‘I’ to ‘we’.

If this research stopped here, it could be concluded that the individual person does in fact get lost in the group. However, the identification of the fifth basic assumption of Me-ness (baM) cannot be ignored. This idea developed by Lawrence, Bain and Gould can give a clearer understanding of the dynamics present in a large group. They proposed that baM is a cultural phenomenon, powered by conscious and unconscious social anxieties and fears (Lawrence et al., 1996). They argued that as the environment becomes more persecuting, the individual will respond to it by cutting-off from its effects and withdrawal into the inner self world.

Lawrence, Bain and Gould identified that baM occurs when a group of people are presented with a task and they adopt an unconscious assumption that the group is to be a non-group. This will mean that the individuals will act as if the group has no existence – if it does, it may potentially be a source of persecuting experiences (Lawrence et al., 1996). They further their idea into calling such group situation “a culture of selfishness in which individuals appear to

be only conscious of their own personal boundaries, which they believe have to be protected from any incursion by others” (Lawrence et al., 1996).

Lawrence et al. argued that as the group is invisible and unknowable in baM, in other ba groups it is the individual who is invisible and unknowable. They believed that the individual becomes lost in the cultures of baD, baF/F, baP and baO. On the other hand, in baM there is an overwhelming anxiety that if the group emerges, the individual will get lost in it. They proposed that baM culture is an unconscious system of defence against experiences of other ba groups. This in turn suggest that baM can only come to an existence if the other ba cultures were present first.

The exploration of baM can be taken further when exploring the membership status of an individual in a large group. Lawrence et al. elaborated on Turquet’s idea of the singleton. Turquet proposed that an individual enters a large group as ‘I’, and as he takes up the membership of the group, he wishes for relations with other members of the group, even though he/she is not yet part of it. Lawrence et al. argued that there is a stage preceding Turquet’s understanding. They recognised a presence of a phenomenon in the group in which the individual does not want to develop relations with another, which doesn’t allow them to enter the ‘I’ stage and is therefore stuck in the ‘me’ stance. This ‘me’ attitude prevents them having and wanting to experience membership of a group (Lawrence et al., 1996). They felt that the phenomenon of baM points to the emphasising of ‘me’ and the exclusion of ‘we’ and ‘us’, both in group situations and social context.

CHAPTER 4 – GROUP THEORY IN THE CONTEXT OF WIDER SOCIETY

Shapiro et al. (2012) proposed that all group relations conferences are to some degree reflections of the social context. They believed that they cannot be isolated from the society or the culture in which they take place. The conferences provide an opportunity for grasping some of the ways in which social institutions are created.

Garland wrote “Groups exert a powerful regressive pull against a hard-won depressive position functioning in each individual” (Garland, 2010, p. 217-218). She believed that through participation in a group, a member can subsume their capacity for thought in the group’s leader, even if the leader may not be sane or competent. She pointed to the existence of an overwhelming anxiety of being excluded. When a member interprets this anxiety as a fear of being left to die, this can lead to crowd contagion or hysteria (Garland, 2010). She proposed that the psychotic behaviour of a group arises as a result of the group assuming that to share a name is to share a character and behaviour.

The phenomenon could be linked with Le Bon’s original description of a crowd. Once in a crowd, individuals can appear to behave in ways that have no relation to their original temperaments, occupations, intelligences or tastes (Le Bon, 1895, as referenced by Garland, 2010). Freud further developed Le Bon’s work on the group mind, as he wrote

We are reminded of [...] how little originality and personal courage are to be found in it, of how much every individual is ruled by those attributes of the group mind which exhibit themselves in such forms as racial characteristics, class prejudiced, public opinion, etc. (Freud, 1921/2001, p. 117)

Lawrence et al. (1996) proposed that basic assumption Me-ness is becoming more salient in industrialised cultures – that it is a cultural phenomenon engendered by conscious and unconscious social anxieties and fears. As contemporary societies are perceived as being riskier to the individuals, they are pressed further into their own inner reality in order to “exclude and deny the perceived disturbing realities that are of the outer environment” (Lawrence et al, 1996). They pointed out that while there are differences in national cultures, there are also striking similarities.

Lawrence et al. hypothesised the presence of a ‘tribalisation’ process in Easter Bloc countries in Europe. They believed that this process is causing people to reaffirm their primary national identity. They proposed that as the monolithic political structures crumble in a country, the individuals can be seen being pressed into forms of Me-ness – the individual loses faith and trust in any structure. They wrote “as the environment becomes more persecuting in reality one response is for individual to make themselves more cut-off from the effects and withdraw into the inner world of self” (Lawrence et al., 1996)

The threat of losing one’s identity, as demonstrated by the basic assumption Me-ness, can be understood in a wider context. Jonathan Haidt (2016) described the rise of nationalism in Western democracies. He pointed out that globalisation has raised prosperity all over the world, with the exception of working classes of Western Societies. They have lost access to well-paid but relatively skilled jobs, which were given to immigrants willing to work for less or were

shipped overseas. Haidt believed that authoritarianism can be used to explain the rise of racism and hostility to immigration (Haidt, 2016).

While globalism attempts to promote more inclusivity and protection of all, nationalists on the other hand believe that the culture of their country is unique and worth preserving. They feel a bond with their country and they believe that its' citizens have a moral obligation to love and serve their country. They believe that their government have a duty to protect their own people and place their own national interests above the interests of people in other countries. Haidt explains the rise of racism as follows

People don't just hate others just because they have darker skin [...] they hate people whom they perceive as having values that are incompatible with their own, or who (they believe) engage in behaviours they find abhorrent, or whom they perceive to be a threat to something their hold dear. (Haidt, 2016)

Authoritarianism can be seen as a psychological predisposition to become intolerant when a certain kind of threat is perceived. Haidt believed that authoritarians are trying to protect their group or society. He referenced the work of Stenner (2005), who proposed that the move away from tradition can produce a backlash and activate a rise in authoritarian values. Progressiveness can be seen as a threat to the country's traditions and identity – this can be seen in the rise of right-wing political parties and dramatic actions such as Brexit or banning Muslim immigration to the United States (Haidt, 2016).

Perhaps it can be hypothesised that in the rise of extreme nationalist movements, two trends can be distinguished. The basic assumption Meness can arise as a way of preserving the country's identity. Lawrence et al. wrote “the more that the individual is driven into Meness

the more selfish individuals become for this is the only way they can survive in the social world” (Lawrence et al., 1996). The country rejects the idea of unity – without it there would be no source of persecuting experiences. On the other hand, it can be argued that there is a presence of basic assumption Oneness – the citizens uniting in their sense of national identification and coming together to protect their country’s values and traditions.

CHAPTER 5 – CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to explore the experience of the group relations conference, keeping in mind the question of the individuality of the members. It sought to identify whether individuality is compromised when one participates in a group. Through exploration of the dynamics in both small and large groups, this research attempted to expand the understanding of group experience for an individual member.

The author has demonstrated, through the analysis of key literature, that the question of loss of individuality is inconclusive. The literature suggests that loss of individuality can be seen in the three basic assumptions of Bion and the basic assumption Oneness proposed by Turquet. The members of the group come together in sharing united assumption of the purpose and task of the group. On the other hand, basic assumption Me-ness proposed by Lawrence, Bain and Gould rejects unity of the group in a desperate attempt to preserve the member's individuality.

Group theory has supported a better understanding of the interpersonal dynamics in the context of wider society. As proposed by Shapiro et al., a group relations conference can mirror the current state of the society in which the conference is taking place. This research has identified that in the current political climate, the danger of losing national identity can give rise to group dynamics present in this research – basic assumption Oneness and Me-ness.

Having conducted an analysis of the available literature pertaining to group dynamics, the author has identified a gap in research and understanding in relation to the loss of individuality

in a group situation, particularly in the context of a group relations conference. Shapiro et al. (2012) stipulated that it has been “almost a tradition” not to write about group conferences. They argued that the immediacy of experience in the moment becomes lost as soon as it becomes past experience. The author is unsure whether this is a valid reasoning. It is thought that through the conduct of further research, specifically the exploration of the personal experience of an individual in a group situation, a gap in knowledge could be bridged.

Overall, this research would conclude that depending on unconscious processes arising in a studied group, the individuality can be either lost or preserved.

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