

# The Institutional Dynamics of the International Society for Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine (ISPPM)

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**A financially catastrophic international congress triggered the ISPPM into a period of intense, powerful, difficult and at times dysfunctionally destructive behaviour. This technical working note seeks to analyse the dynamics and trace their roots in common unconscious processes. It examines issues of corporate counter-transference and social defence-maintenance while offering indications of possible developments in process and structure which could lead to greater future integration. The 'case study' is made public as an example of organisational analysis using the new paradigm including the field of common pre and perinatal psychology. It offers a mirror in which other therapeutic and professional organisations may catch a recognisable reflection of their own behaviour! [June 1990]**

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The events of Bad Gastein and the subsequent psychodrama are still raising intense but varied emotions and attitudes within members. One viewpoint states, 'Let's forget the history and get on with the job now'. However, those who ignore their history are condemned to repeat it. As in any individual integration and analysis, it is essential to own and rework past traumata in institutional processes so that there can be a continuous conscious time-line from the preconceptions of the institution to its current operational dynamics.

At the other end of this spectrum, several members appear to be stuck in the events of Bad Gastein and return to it continuously. The position of fixation is further evidence of the intensity of the trauma and requires some institutional setting for its working through if energy is not to be locked permanently in the past.

Polarisation appears to emerge around the issues of Bad Gastein in many different forms, the most intense of which are associated with leadership personalities, which become the scapegoats, or ground figures, for the projection of idealisation, whether of good or bad, benign or malign influence. The two key figures of Peter Fedor-Freyberg and Professor Schusser are elevated into the roles of antithetical heroes and tend to be emptied of the realities of humanity, to be viewed either as ideally good or ideally evil figures in the institutional psychodrama.

The issues of finance and resource are now treated with an acute obsession, following the traumatic implosion of institutional resources, occasioned by the Bad Gastein conference. Here again it seems to me that there is an intensity of concern which belies triggered paranoid material, rather than the maturity of being able to see the situation realistically and take appropriate steps to solve the problem.

There have also been some instances of flight and withdrawal as the institutional dynamics become intolerable for those concerned, who sense that to be outside is to be better than to be inside. The womb has gone bad, separation is the only course of action that can be tolerated if psychic survival is to be assured.

Then there are the issues of boundaries and the splitting of good and bad projection across those boundaries, currently mediated by the issue of language and focused around the journal. The international process is therefore reflected into an intra-nationalism, with the fragmentation emerging inside the international institution, but at the boundaries of the national groupings. This intra-institutional fragmentation would indicate the extra-institutional boundary pressure which has been internalised.

Styles of leadership which are tolerated within the current context also reflect a revolt against control, power and autocracy and have now tended to move into the opposite direction of fragmentation, individuation and autonomy, with the result that constitutional wording is extremely loose, issues of accreditation have been down-graded and leadership is castrated in so far as it seeks to exercise any power and authority, either over or on behalf of membership. This withdrawal of delegated responsibility is another facet of the paranoid institution.

The financial collapse and subsequent massive debt of the ISPPM following the Bad Gastein conference is being seen as the cause of many of the problems. My suggestion is that the financial issues are in fact symptomatic of underlying dynamics which are currently being ignored. The way an organisation handles its finances and the financial well-being or otherwise of an organisation, are themselves symptomatic of underlying structures of health and well-being, boundary transactions and power play. I think it would be extremely useful to examine the financial situation in terms of its symptomaticity and to try therefore to understand the dynamics to which the institution was and is subject, and which have led to this particular presentation.

The principal area for examination would appear to be that of institutional transference and counter-transference. It is not a field that is familiar to many members of the ISPPM, whose main work interfaces them with individuals, either within the medical profession, or as clients within therapy, integration, analysis, regression, personal development etc. Very few members have experience and training in organisational analysis, group dynamics analysis, and the unconscious processes of institutional behaviour.

The subject material to which the ISPPM is addressed evokes some of the most powerful unconscious resistance ever encountered by a paradigm shift within society. It deals with those issues, imprints, dynamics and emotions, which for many, many people are associated with intense trauma and are subject therefore to intense and intensely common and collusional patterns and structures of defence, repression and defence-maintenance. So gynaecologists becoming open to pre and perinatal psychology become ostracised by their colleagues, as do psychoanalysts and therapists. Clients, working through pre and perinatal material, transfer onto the members of the society their own as-yet-unresolved unconscious defences, together with the societal defences mediated to the clients by their familial, organisational and community networks. In addition to these two levels of collegiate institutions and clients, there is a third level of transference into the ISPPM, namely that of inter-institutional dynamic. It is becoming clear that one of the primary binding drives of institutionalisation is defence against very primitive anxiety, laid down in the pre and perinatal stages of human development. Any institution, like the ISPPM, therefore, which engages in raising awareness of this particular fundamental area, threatens the defences of every other institution in its social context, and is therefore treated as if it is the cause of those very anxieties against which the social defences are in place. The ISPPM, therefore, in company with other institutions which have attempted to tackle this agenda, is subject to inter-institutional projection in an attempt to repair the breach in the common social defences.

There are several consequences. At an intra-institutional level, members of the Society look to the Society for a certain amount of support, security, encouragement, resource and safety, in a world in which they are experiencing transference of projected negativity. The Society becomes the safe inside, with a dangerous outside. It is, in effect, treated as a good womb by

membership. Within this corporate regression, leadership, resources and boundary management are subjected to pre and perinatal psychodrama at an intense, unconscious and corporate level. Unreasonable assumptions are made of continued exponential expansion of membership. There are also expectations of resource without limit, inadequate differentiation of subgroup dynamics and a sense that this corporate womb provides an unlimited and self-cleansing sink into which all kinds of negativities can be dumped without having to consider the consequences. Leadership is elevated to take the responsibility for boundary management and in particular for making certain that the negativities projected into the outside by members are prevented from re-entering. It is under these conditions, of course, that the leader becomes the target of scapegoating activity and is forced into a messianic role, subject to intense ambivalence and oscillates in perception of either being the container or the contained within the institutional process. He is omnipotent, he is impotent. He is the victim of institutional retaliation by the monster he has created, or conversely he is the dominant tyrant whose dictatorship must be overthrown. Displacement and rationalisation of the agenda ensue.

In short, through the multitudinous networks of individual contacts, the societal agenda is transferred into the intra-institutional dynamic unconscious and is then acted out in institutional psychodrama, in so far as the members of the institution are unconscious of the institutional level of the transference process. Since this field is precisely that of the most common core of the pre and perinatal unconscious, the institutional dynamics will resonate around processes which reflect the as-yet unresolved common pre and perinatal imprinting, which constitute the ground of collusion between the intra-institutional unconscious, and its societal environment. Institutional dynamics therefore constitute a counter-transference into the societal client which justifies and reinforces the client's defence maintenance and blocks further development, integration, consciousness-raising and insight.

Insofar as members of the ISPPM are experiencing conditions of ostracism and alienation within their own professional institutions, it is likely that they are still facing as-yet-unresolved areas of their own pre and perinatal imprinting, which lead them precisely into counter-transference dynamics within their home institutions. It is therefore all the more likely and all the more intense when large gatherings of such persons come together that they reflect in the unconscious dynamics of their own institutional process precisely the most acute paranoid-schizoid processes of the back-home institutions from which they come. Dynamic processes within the gatherings of ISPPM can therefore be expected to be some kind of multi-dimensional holographic mirror of the paranoid-schizoid processes of institutional dynamics (with their roots in pre and perinatal imprinting), which characterise the institutional behaviours of our so-called 'civilised' society.

Against this background, I would suggest the dynamics of Bad Gastein and its subsequent outworking make sense as a stage within a process of societal learning which requires a raising of awareness of the processes of transference and counter-transference from that of the individual analyst working with a client, to that of the analytic institution engaging in a societal environment. I would suggest that this field of institutional counter-transference requires quite as much work, and is if anything far more complex than the issues encountered in a training analysis designed to minimise the effects of counter-transference in the analyst/analysand relationship.

The issue of social ambivalence about the field of pre and perinatal psychology is also reflected in the use of finance. There is a verbal endorsement of the agenda, backed by a promise to attend, to provide funding, sponsorship and resources. The negative pole of ambivalence is then experienced as a withdrawal of attendance, a shift into dependency in which resources are expected to be gained from the institution, rather than the benefits paid for. Promises of sponsorship are then muted into messages of goodwill but without active financial contribution. The financial short-fall and subsequent financial crisis of the institution following the Bad Gastein conference can therefore be seen as symptoms of these underlying dynamics. Secondary processes then build up as the members find themselves in a corporate regression with placental failure, under-resourced, insecure, boundaries under attack, leadership imploding. Under these powerful stimuli unconscious abreaction of imprints of placental failure, difficulties of implantation, threatened abortion, perinatal impingement, oxygen deprivation etc. are all restimulated. In the subsequent rising corporate anxiety, some of the most damaged people rise to the top to act out some form of perinatal psychodrama or heroic struggle on behalf of the corporate unconscious.

Once that institutional trauma point has been reached, the organisational level of the ISPPM then acts in common with other institutional psychodynamic defence structures, so effectively preventing further disturbance of societal defences. The result is a containment of the disturbance, an internalising of energy into the fight/flight, regression, ambivalence process, with the result that the societal energies are mirrored into intra-institutional splitting, so minimising further intervention in the societal unconscious. These are processes with which we are now quite familiar in terms of reaction to people like Otto Rank, Graber, Reich and Janov. So, for instance, while talking about processes of integration, the actual process employed is disintegrated. While interventions with an individual may involve both right brain and left brain, psyche and soma, emotions and body armour, the corporate culture is intensely bookish, left-brained, verbal, schizoid and intellectual. Linguistic structures are developed in which it is difficult for members to articulate and service their material to a wider audience and conversely the international learning processes tend to be limited to schizoid linguistic structures which do not communicate beyond the narrow elite. Insight and interventions are kept to the individualistic and associated with sickness models, and learning about the institutional and collusional levels of the pre and perinatal imprinting is intensely repressed.

If we examine dynamics at a different level we see the inter-institutional processes of those organisations with the common agenda of pre and perinatal psychology indicating and replicating in today's context some of the splits previously associated with the different schools of psychoanalysis. If we therefore take as an aggregation that set of institutions handling the agenda of pre and perinatal psychology at an international level, we find similar inter-institutional dynamic processes to those we have identified at the intra-institutional level within the ISPPM itself. This global fragmentation of the field again serves the same societal agenda of defence maintenance, albeit at a different level.

The whole enterprise is being carried out in a global context in which the species is meeting the constraints of limits to growth within a finite and vulnerable holding environment. In this setting, every level of the world behaviour is being triggered into resonance with perinatal imprinting, so providing contextual reinforcement of the counter-transference dynamics already noted. Paradoxically, the context also sets the imperative agenda for exploration and resolution of pre and perinatal dynamics in social system behaviour, since failure to

deconstruct the pathology of unconscious societal psychodrama could be species-threatening and environmentally catastrophic.

In looking to the future, I sense that a certain amount of priority needs therefore to be given to work on the interpersonal, group, organisational, institutional and societal levels of pre and perinatal psychology. This concern would have to be at an existential rather than purely objective level - in other words we need to raise our own awareness as well as study these dynamics in other institutions. As the Society progresses, careful attention must be paid to the most appropriate structures for facilitating a developmental network for personal and professional support and integration, which would serve as a learning system for every level of the agenda. Groups, study days, conferences, etc. could quite easily be designed as experiential learning events, with opportunities for reflection on the interpersonal, group and institutional level of process and dynamic, as well as upon the content of the papers delivered. There is considerable experience within this field within the international community which could be brought to bear upon this task, but it will only be utilised in so far as our own defences and repressive projections are withdrawn from this level of the material.

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