The Prevention and Treatment of Organizationally Induced Trauma

Reported by:

Stephen M. Sonnenberg

Moderated by:

William Myerson

William Myerson noted the potential for psychoanalytic training to induce trauma, and that long-term, intensive group consultation can help ameliorate those effects. At the Houston-Galveston Psychoanalytic Institute (HGPI) there exists an 8 year history of consultation, and when there is a lapse what has been learned can be forgotten. Myerson suggested that troubling organizational structures in institutes are bound to the training analyst system, which creates competition that cannot be addressed. He also noted that many analysts report being deeply hurt during their training.

Myerson noted his institute is growing. It was founded by white male psychiatrists in 1975, and in the last 20 years women have been admitted to the faculty and risen to positions of prominence, and now non-psychiatrists are becoming training analysts. Many aspects of this history have been hurtful and suppressed the expression of painful feelings.

As the institute grew, there arose a need for more people to do the work. A younger president tried to democratize the organization, but became incapacitated. The next president was a woman, and her tenure was difficult. She tried to work with the older faculty, while keeping alive the atmosphere of change. In the end, she could please almost no one, leading to the initial outside consultation.

Toward the end of her tenure, one senior faculty member became the subject of an ethics investigation. Also, the old education committee, composed entirely of training analysts, was replaced by a democratized board of directors, which included a candidate representative and non-training analysts. That new board faced this very disturbing ethics investigation at the same time as a new set of rules came into being which governed its function.

The new president, early in his term, wanted to reinstitute the outside consultation, but it took almost until the end of his term for it to take place. This occurred in part because of pressure from candidates.

When the consultation occurred, it was led by a consultant (one of the panelists) who had previously worked with the institute. He encouraged faculty and candidates to express their feelings. A tension which existed between the institute and its child-development center was discussed, as were tensions involving faculty and students. Many people took risks, and fought openly, and the propriety of money donated to the institute was discussed.

Kimberly Copeland, a candidate, spoke next. She noted that when her class arrived at the institute candidates saw faculty competing with each other, and using candidates to wage battle. She recalled how her class received misinformation provided by faculty members about each other. There was a great deal of tension between her class and one several years ahead of it. There was a difficult relationship between the institute and its child-development center, which resulted in the devaluation of candidates who were studying child analysis. Her class also struggled because one of its members felt that the institute had not handled her needs properly. All these factors were traumatic stressors on Copeland's class as it began its training.

In general, speaking for the candidates, she noted that at the start of the recent consultations there was a level of fear of speaking out, but that her colleagues did so, and in some ways initially spoke for the institute and led the faculty to be able to speak. She noted that it was a candidate who spoke openly about...
the undesirable way one faculty member behaved in the consultation.

She felt the consultation had been necessary, and had many good effects on the candidates, including an understanding of tensions within the institute, an understanding of its history, and the reduction of faculty using students to communicate among themselves. She feels that now she can approach faculty members more directly. She believes there is a general reduction in paranoid anxiety among students, and that candidates feel much better about the new openness. She added that there were slippery slopes in the consultation, as well, such as candidates hearing things about their training analysts from others, without a mechanism for control of what was learned.

Cynthia Lee spoke about how she transitioned from student to faculty during the consultation, and about the disruptive impact on her analysis. Because her analyst was a significant emotional leader during the consultation, and was active in discussions which revealed institute dysfunction, her experience was upsetting.

Lee recently dreamed that a faculty member killed himself in an automobile, because he had violated sexual boundaries. Lee believes this dream figure represented her analyst: in the dream everyone knew things about him but her; that he was the opposite of what she thought he was. This reminded her of how miserable and uncertain the consultation process caused her to feel.

Lee said if she had anticipated being a candidate for the entire consultation she would not have attended. She feels in the short term the consultation was traumatic: she learned about conflicts involving her analyst that could have destroyed her analysis. But the analysis got back on track, and she has come to understand that her participation reflected a wish to be taken seriously as a new faculty member and her choice to live with possible trauma. She also feels the consultation has improved institute life, and is glad it took place.

She believes that a training analysis is very different from a regular analysis, probably more thorough, but not a model for regular clinical analysis. It is conducted within the traumatizing community of an institute.

Stephen M. Sonnenberg then noted that the relationship between analyst and analysand is now the focus for examining how psychoanalysis heals, and that he has been working to better understand the nature of his relationships with his training analysands. He focused on how his experience with one training analysand has contributed to shifts in his view of how he might interact with such individuals. Some of that experience involved the analysand's painful reaction to the consultation.

Sonnenberg approves of efforts to create an institute which is a learning community, where people can relate differently to each other in different situations. He welcomes the openness made possible by the consultation, and believes that we do not know enough to assert with certainty that the training analyst must remain sequestered and anonymous. He adds that such openness does not prevent him from working with training analysands within the boundaries of a protected relationship, where trust, intimacy, and privacy are maintained. He is experimenting with interacting with his training analysands as academic colleagues, teaching them in classes, and inviting them to participate with him in various academic experiences.

Kenneth Eisold felt that his role as the consultant was to promote discussion of transition, the giving up of control by the institute founders, the shift away from a hierarchical system, and the adoption of a new and expanded mission for psychoanalysis. He felt his central function was to promote a safe environment in which people could express themselves.

David Scharff, Chevy Chase, began the discussion from the floor. He wanted to know more about the trauma of the candidates. Myerson responded that within institutes trauma is ongoing, and Copeland noted in counterpoint that hearing others talk about one's analyst during the consultation was traumatic. Jorge de la Torre, also of the HGPI, stated that democratization may have eroded the barrier that promotes the safety of dyads, and unfortunately resulted in more attention to administration than education.

William Glover, San Francisco, noted that Siegfried Bernfeld, who was discussed in Sonnenberg's paper, was institutionally traumatized when he was denied membership in the San Francisco Institute, and David Scharff noted that when institutes do not change they often hurt candidates and faculty.

Robert Galatzer-Levy, Chicago, noted there was a tension within the consultation process and its aftermath, especially, he believed, to be heard in Sonnenberg's comments. He worried that structures that
protect may not be preserved. He pointed out that, if the training analyst offers the trainee opportunities to work together outside of the analysis, that can promote for the candidate a life which is exclusively defined by the relationship to the analyst. He also expressed concern that when administrative activities become overwhelming the institution may lose sight of its need to protect its members. Myerson responded that there is no such thing as a benign organization, and that, if his institute didn't engage in the consultation, and didn't change, there would be casualties. He also noted that Sonnenberg's paper reflected the effort to promote openness at the HGPI, an openness which would embrace inquiry about educational innovation.

Sonnenberg responded to Galatzer-Levy: his purpose now is to promote discussion, to ask questions, so that over time we can enhance our understanding of the optimal relationship between training analyst and analysand. He agreed that Galatzer-Levy had pointed out a situation requiring ongoing study.

Mira Erlich-Ginor, Jerusalem, noted that in her institute this kind of intervention would be useful, that it is rare, needs to be written about and published, and candidates need to work within the group, and when they graduate continue to work for the process of change. Myerson agreed that starting with candidates, when they are young and not rigidified, is essential.

Jill Scharff, Chevy Chase, noted that the training analysis and the personal analysis have the central task of understanding what is unconscious, and that organizational processes must be approached in the same way. She emphasized that such inquiry had to be regular, ongoing, and growth promoting.

Naomi Janowitz, San Francisco, asked about the wellbeing of the candidates who spoke out. Myerson reassured her, stating that Eisold's work as the consultant had made it safe for everyone to speak out.

Glover noted that the collapse of the psychic space of the training analysis was of concern to him when there is organizational consultation. He wondered how we can maintain organizational openness and the safety of the training analysis. Myerson concluded for the panelists: we could not keep things the way they were, but how we change them is a challenge requiring ongoing attention, taking nothing for granted. He agreed with Glover's concern, but felt that so far increased organizational openness and attention to candidate safety had proven compatible.