

# Caught In The Trap of Projective Identification: Enacting the group's basic assumption of dependency

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## ABSTRACT

The concept of projective identification (PI), which was initially conceived by Klein as a defense process used by the infant against the death instinct and a means to make order in his/her object relational world, is now used to explain human interactions in various sittings. For instance, there are numerous group studies using the concept of PI to understand such roles as leadership, scapegoat, group mentality, and so on. However, most of the authors have confined themselves to a mere application of the concept, providing no discussion on how PI, initially an individual process, spreads to the group-as-a-whole to become a group process. Therefore, based on Bion's (1961) group theory, the author has tried to discuss the conditions and the process leading to group or mutual projective identification (MPI), through a description of how the basic assumption group (baG), especially the basic assumption of dependency (baD), develops. He concluded that the emergence of baD is the result of 1) a mating of the members' personal dependency "pre-conception" (Bion, 1962) with a "negative realization", 2) the combination of the members through their respective "dependency valency" and, 3) the formation of a sort of "emotional channel" linking members together, and 4) the members' resorting to MPI to evacuate their baD needs and desires, and as a result, 5) the transformation of individual dependency "pre-conceptions" into baD as a group fantasy. As illustration, the author presents a clinical vignette from a 6-session D-group, in which the group resorted to MPI. The group projected its baD needs into the trainer to protect them from him, and, as put by Bion (1961), make him enact these needs on the behalf of the whole group. Following a feedback from one observer, the trainer could free himself from the group's unconscious manipulation and be able to confront the group with its manipulative behaviour and the baD, and consequently, help it to get out from the impasse in which it had been trapped for two successive sessions.

## Introduction

As suggested by a great number of analytically-oriented writers, it is not an exaggeration to state that the concept "projective identification" (PI) is the most fruitful psychoanalytic concept since the discovery and conceptualization of the unconscious by the father of the psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. It was first coined by Melanie Klein (1946) and has been since then widely used by Kleinian (e.g., Segal, 1973; Rosenfeld, 1987; Bion, 1967; Meltzer, 1992), and, according to Spillius (1988) even non-Kleinian analysts

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(e.g., Searles, 1978-79). There have been also various attempts to clarify, develop, and extend this concept. The purpose of the present study is therefore, 1) to examine in details the concept of projective identification from the different vertices from which it has been discussed, namely its difference with other concepts such as projection, the nature of the content projected (bad object parts or good part objects), the object (external or internal objects), 2) to describe the process and conditions which make possible PI, and 3) to present a case study illustrating how the trainer (the author) of a diagnostic group (D-group) (Hafsi, 2004) became a target of the group PI and was manipulated by the group in order to make him play a role in the group's phantasy or basic assumption of dependency (Bion, 1961).

### **Definition of Projective Identification**

According to Klein (1946), PI is initially stirred by the presence of the death instinct within the infant. Due to the death instinct, the infant, in the first months of life, experiences feelings of aggressive impulses, severe anxiety and fear of annihilation from within. To protect himself against these feelings, the infant resorts to PI as a defense means. He splits off these bad and unwanted feelings, or bad parts of the self, and projects them onto the object (the breast as a part object, and later the mother as a whole object), and then identifies them with the object, while continuing to feel them as his own. For at this stage the infant is still unable to differentiate between himself and the external object (the breast, the mother). Similarly, Segal (1973) describes PI in the following:

*From the original projection of the death instinct there evolves another mechanism of defense, extremely important in this phase of development, namely projective identification. In projective identification parts of the self and internal objects are split off and projected into the external object which then becomes possessed by, controlled and identified with the projected parts (p. 27).*

Since Klein's early and vague description of the concept of PI, there have been numerous attempts by her early students, disciples, and even non-kleinian thinkers to shed further light on this concept from different vertices and in different interpersonal settings. This has led to a heated and wide-ranging debate concerning various aspects of PI. For instance, writers were divided concerning the nature and the role of PI in the therapeutical interaction. Some considers it as an essential normal process resorted to not only by the infant but by adults as well, to make order in one's object relationships, communicate, interact with others, develop, and survive. Segal (1973) described PI as "the earliest form of empathy...(and) the basis of the earliest form of symbol-formation" (p. 36).

Similarly, Bion (1967) views it as also the most important form of interaction between the therapist and the patient in individual therapy and in all kinds of groups. As put by Hinshelwood (1991), for Bion, PI constitutes "the basic building block for generating thoughts out of experiences and perceptions" (p. 189-90) when a healthy container-contained interaction is available.

On the other hand, there are those who emphasizes rather the malign aspect of PI, viewing it as a pathological mechanism belonging to a specified area of emotional pathology. For example, Kernberg (1984) and Meissner (1984) see PI as a failed projection because the self fails to definitively discharge itself of unwanted impulses, and the projected material returns to the self. According to these authors, this failure is the result of incomplete ego boundaries between the self and the object. For Kernberg, PI is a defence mechanism peculiar to psychosis and borderline personality organization, and is not encountered in neurosis, save in extremely regressive states. What characterizes neurosis is rather projection. Meltzer (1975) seem also to share this view of PI as a pathogenic mechanism. For them PI is operative at the core of autism, and is "the mechanism of narcissistic identification, the basis of hypochondria, confusional states, claustrophobia, paranoia, psychotic depression and perhaps some psychosomatic disorders (p.64)". Of course, this does not imply that Meltzer does not recognize the positive aspect of PI. For he (Meltzer, 1992) also describes it, as shown by his concept of "claustrum", as a process used desperately by the patient to defend himself against schizophrenic breakdown.

Another key issue debated by writers is whether and how PI should be distinguished from projection. The principal basis for the distinction between these two concepts is whether the recipient of the projection has been affected emotionally by the content (phantasy) projected on him by the projector. While in the case of projection the recipient does not need to be affected, in the case of PI, the presence of an affected object is an indispensable condition. However, according to Spillius (1988), restricting the term of PI to the case where the projector is affected by the content of the PI would diminish "the usefulness of the concept and is in any case totally contrary to what Klein herself meant by it. The English view is that the term is best kept as a general concept broad enough to include cases in which the recipient is emotionally affected and those in which he is not" (p. 81-3). This view is not entirely shared by Segal (1973), another Kleinian, who seems to side rather with those who think that for PI to take place the presence of an external and affected object is necessary. She writes that "in projective identification parts of the self and internal objects are split off and projected into the external object, which then becomes possessed by, controlled and identified with the projected parts" (p. 27) This view is shared by Bion who also refers to an external object as a target of projection and manipulation by the projector.

Moreover, concerning the object of PI, there are writers, like Spillius (1988) who argue that projection is not made into external objects only but into internal objects too. For instance Meltzer (1992) devotes an entire book to projective identification into internal objects. He confessed that he had for long time been uncomfortable and dissatisfied with Klein's continuous use of PI as a psychotic mechanism which targets exclusively external objects, taking no consideration of the fact that an important part of mental space is occupied by internal objects.

PI was also discussed in terms of its aim. Most of the writers agree that projective identification has manifold aims. It is directed towards the ideal objects in order to avoid experiencing separation, or it may be used in relationship with the bad object, in order to gain control of it since it is perceived as a source of danger. PI is also used to get rid of bad parts of the self, to attack and destroy the object into which projection is made. It may be also used to project good parts to preserve them from internal bad objects, or "to improve the external object through a kind of primitive projective reparation" (Segal, 1973; p. 27). Communicating one's actual experience, by projecting one's feelings into an object and making him/her experience them (Bion, 1967; Ogden, 1982), or as put by Bion (1961) forcing him/her play a role in one's phantasy is also another aim of PI (Hafsi, 1993; 1995).

There is another aspect of PI which deserves to be referred to here, namely, the distinction between, on one hand, projecting into an (external or internal) object parts of the self foreign to that object, and, on the other hand, eliciting in the object a feeling, response, or a given personality aspect from the object's latent repertory of responses, amplifying it, and stirring a re-projection of that aspect. In this case the object is not invaded by alien self parts from the projector. That is, although the recipient may feel strange and manipulated, what is projected fits in his/her unconscious and internal object relations world. In other words, the projector does not randomly project his/her self parts; he/she targets only recipients who can unconsciously identify and can be identified with the psychic material being projected. For instance, sharing this view, Searles (1978), a non-kleinian analyst, acknowledged that he has very regularly been able to find some real basis (in himself) for those qualities which his patients project upon him. According to him patients have the ability to get in touch with, or read the therapist's unconscious, because patients are always alert to minor behavioral and mental changes in others (including the therapist) around them, and to the least (conscious and unconscious) aspect of their personalities. According to Searles, those patients acquired this ability of reading others' minds through their early interaction with unbearably unpredictable parents (see also Hafsi, 2006).

## **Projective Identification In Groups**

There are numerous attempts to understand group phenomena in terms of projection, especially PI (e.g., Bion, 1961; Wisdom, 85; Roitman, 1989). Those attempts are based, among others, on 1) the widely influential freudian claim that any psychology is essentially social psychology (Freud, 1921), and 2) Bion (1961)'s statement concerning the relationship between individual and group psychology which states that "the apparent difference between group psychology and individual psychology is an illusion produced by the fact that the group provides an intelligible field of study for certain aspects of individual psychology..." (p. 134); and a number of aspects or phenomena, such as for instance "scapegoating", "role suction" (Horowitz, 1983; Colman and Geller, 1985) which have been studied and understood in terms of PI.

Most of the studies applying PI to understand group phenomena have tried to convince us of the operation of PI in groups, not merely as an individual but as a "group as-a-whole" process. For instance, Bion (1961) used PI to understand the relationship between group behavior and the formation of what he called the "group mentality". According to him, each group member contributes, through his/her PI, to the formation of the "group mentality", which he defined as "a pool to which...anonymous contributions are made (by each member), and through which... (individual) impulses and desires implicit in these contributions are gratified" (p. 50). Similarly, Grinberg et al. (1976) write that each group member will try, as a result of PI, to unconsciously put pressure on the whole group so he/she will build on it his/her "family constellation", causing others to play certain roles in this constellation for him/her. Grinberg (1979) concludes thus that every role in the group, such as leader, follower, scapegoat, is a product of PI. Horwitz (1983) also writes that essential functions or roles are inherent in the group, and it is as if the group selects, or nominates by means of PI, the candidates most suitable for these specific roles. This is a reformulation of Bion (1961)'s statement that the group under the influence of the basic assumption group (baG) will attribute through PI the role of leader to its sickest member.

As a review of the literature on PI in groups reveals, most writers confined themselves to simply transferring a concept from one area, namely the individual, to another, the group. Bion (1961), for example, suggested that baG and the group mentality are the result of the whole group unconscious alliance through PI, but did not provide further explanation about how PI functions in the group and how this leads to the creation, enactment and preservation of the baG. Therefore, the author will try below to answer this question providing a detailed description of how the group resorts to PI, and consequently comes to experience and express the baG.

### **Projective identification and the emergence of baG**

Before discussing the relationship between PI and the emergence of baG, let us first briefly summarize Bion's thinking about the group and its functioning. According to Bion (1961), when the group is formed it is characterized by two diametrically opposed and simultaneous mental activities, he called "work group" (WG) and "basic assumption group" (baG), with the term *group* referring "only to mental activity of a particular kind, not to the people indulged in it" (p. 144).

WG is a mental state which depicts a group whose members consciously and unconsciously cooperate in order to carry out their basic task. That is, the group is task-centered, uses scientific methods, is conscious of the passage of time, able to learn from experience and concerned about change, improvement and development; in a few words, the group in touch with reality. The WG activity coexists always with another diametrically opposed unconscious mental activity, the baG. According to Bion (1961), depending on the group's mental state, the "WG activity is obstructed, diverted, and on occasion assisted, by" (p. 146) the baG. He adumbrated three different forms of the baG: The basic assumption of dependency (baD), the basic assumption of fight/flight (baF), and the basic assumption of pairing (baP). Briefly described, the baD is characterized by a collective assumption or phantasy that the group has met in order to depend mentally and physically on a leader who is expected to be omniscient, and able to unconditionally help the group whatever is the problem confronted with. When the group is under the influence of baF, its members behave as if they have met to fight or flee from an enemy (leader, scapegoat, therapist, out-group, etc.). Finally, in the case of baP, the group is characterized by a mental state of patience and expectancy; the group unconsciously behaves as if it is expecting the birth of something, "a messianic something" (a plan, an idea, etc.) which will save the group members from their feelings of mutual hatred, self-destructiveness and despair (see, Hafsi, 2004, for a detailed description of the baG). Let us now go back to the main topic of the present paper, PI.

As mentioned previously, we know from Bion that the group activity is characterized by these three baG, and that it is the group members who contribute to the formation of these baG through "valency" - an individual predisposition to combine with others (See, Bion, 1961 and Hafsi, 2006)- and PI. However, there is no detailed study on how these three elements (baG, valency, and PI) interact.

As suggested by Bion (1961), the group experience revives early object relations with their characteristic fears, anxieties and defences processes. For "the group approximates too closely, in the minds of the individuals composing it, to very primitive phantasies about the contents of the mother's body" (p. 162). As a result of regression, the initial stage of the group is experienced by the members as a birth; the individual comes to

the group like the infant comes to life outside his mother's body. Like the infant when he is born and becomes a member of his family, the grown individual also is reborn by joining a group. In both cases, the subject experiences an identity loss; the infant a loss of its "foetality", and the individual a loss of its individuality. Like the newly born infant, the group member is also in a state of entire dependency to the group-as-a-whole, each member, the leader or the therapist (Shepard & Benis, 1956).

Moreover, like the infant is born with the "pre-conception" of finding at birth a "good breast" (Bion, 1967), the individual comes to the group with a set of desires (Anzieu, 1984), and pre-conceptions: 1) a pre-conception of finding reliable or dependable people to satisfy his needs, 2) a pre-conception of finding rivals, aggressors, enemies to fight with or flee, and 3) a pre-conception of finding a mate for sexual union or marriage. According to the author, these pre-conceptions correspond to vestiges of our early object relationships as described by Klein (1946). We can postulate here that the tendency to select and express one particular pre-conception is determined by the subject's type of valency. A person with a dependency valency would display the first type of pre-conception; the persons with fight and flight valencies would display the second type of pre-conception; and people with pairing valency would display the third kind of pre-conception (Hafsi, 2006).

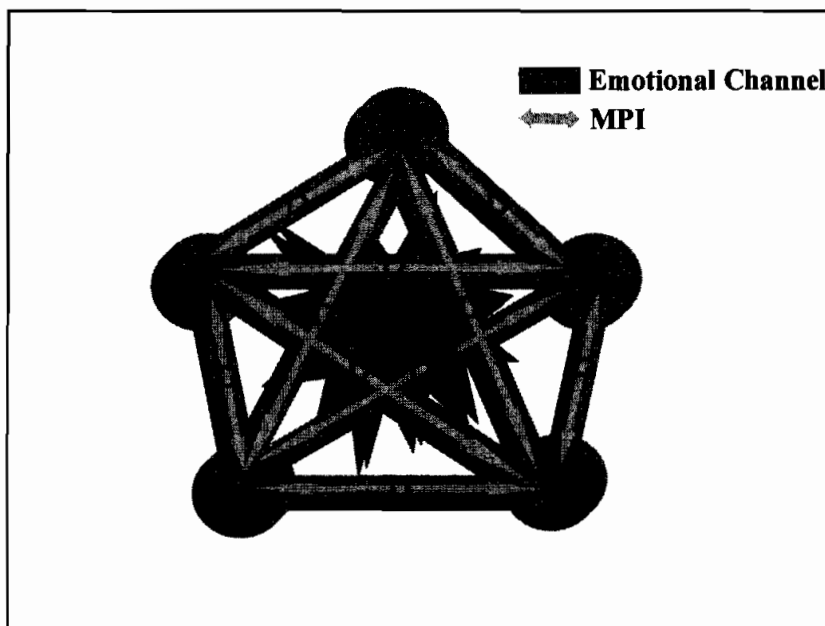


Figure 1. Group projective identification and the emergence of baG

Like in the case of the infant, when a person joins the group he/she quickly, contrary to his/her expectancy, realizes that the group does not always meet his/her needs, or in

Bion's terms, that his/her pre-conceptions do not always mate with a positive realization (Bion, 1961). For instance, in the case of dependency pre-conception, the person will face the difficulty of expressing and satisfying one's dependency needs in front of others. This experience will generate individual frustration, and stimulate the group towards combination, as a defense process. That is, the members will, as represented in Figure 1, use their dependency valencies to combine with each other and consequently get bound together (Hafsi, 2006). This creates in the group an unconscious feeling of a "wholeness", or an experience of the "group-as-a-whole", and gives birth to the group as a mental "collective representation" (Durkheim, 1965), or a "social representation" (Moscovici, 2001), an entity distinct from the sum of its members (Lewin, 1948). The group is thus endowed with a "voice", feelings, needs, and a mentality. The members begin to speak in the name of the group, using "we", and "us", and no single member would take credit for this mentality, because it is, as put by Bion (1961), a product of unconscious, simultaneous and anonymous contribution by all the members.

Moreover, the behavioral and emotional content characterizing the group mentality depends on the valency type bounding the group together (Hafsi, 2006). If, for instance, members are bound through their respective dependency valency like in Figure 1, the group will experience the baD group, and the group mentality will reflect the baD group. How do group members get bound through their valencies, and how do individual pre-conceptions relate to the baG displayed are questions I will try now to answer.

After experiencing unconsciously and/or consciously the feeling of being bound, and experiencing frustration, the group members will thus view their dependency needs and pre-conceptions, as unwanted bad parts and try to get rid of them, resorting to simultaneous and mutual projective identification (MPI). Hence, according to the author, the feeling of being bound through valency is a pre-requisite for the operation of this mutual PI (Hafsi, 2006). The bound through valency create a sort of "emotional channel" which will allow the passage of unconscious material from one member to another and to the whole group. Therefore, MPI does not take place without this channel. Once this channel has been formed, each member will thus split off these dependency parts (D) of the self and project them, through this channel, on each other. As a result, each member is at the same time a projector and a recipient of others' projection. As a function of MPI, members will then manipulate each other so that each member will unconsciously express others' dependency phantasy and behave in accordance with it, which leads, as indicated in Figure 1, to the transformation of individual dependency needs and pre-conceptions into the group's baD. Thus, the baG, with its three different types (baD, baF, baP), is the result of the transformation of individual pre-conceptions about the group by means of MPI.



When under the influence of baG, for instance baD, the group will behave accordingly and manage to have their dependency needs contained and satisfied by the therapist, the leader or the whole group. However, if, for one or another reason, the group's needs could not find a container (Bion, 1970), and were consequently frustrated, the group will unconsciously and/or consciously experience these needs and the baD as unwanted inappropriate and/or bad objects, good only for projection outward or inward. That is, the group will thus split off these parts and project them outward onto out-groups (e.g., other groups, persons, organizations, countries), manipulate them so they fit into these parts, and finally identify these out-groups with these unwanted and projected parts. This will trigger the "It is not us, it's them" accusatory process. This process can be especially observed when the group is under the influence of baF and has projected its aggressive impulses onto other groups or persons.

The group MPI can be also directed towards in-groups. Everyone, therapist, leader, group members, may become a target of MPI. The group projects its bad and good parts onto these targets 1) to get rid of them, prevent them from obstructing the group process by finding them a container. When this container is available and is adequately functioning, it is expected to "detoxify" these part, rendering them less frightening and more acceptable to the group-as-a-whole.

Unfortunately this is not always the case; for there is not always a container available, and the group does not always easily acknowledge the "badness" or the inappropriateness of a given aspect of its mental activity. For instance, the group may not unconsciously identify with the therapist or trainer's interpretation that the group's dependency has been hindering the normal group process, and may even try to rationalize the group's dependent behavior as unavoidable and indispensable and good for the group's survival. In this case, the group will display strong resistance and will try to defend itself, resorting to MPI as a means to place temporary its dependency needs into a group member including, the therapist, leader, or trainer, depending on the group type and theoretical orientation of the therapist or leader of the group.

The purpose of this defensive strategy is twofold. One of the purposes is faking change, or pretending that the group has changed, by creating a dependent member and then taking care of him or her. This corresponds to what Bion (1961) called "dual of dependency". The other purpose is to force the dependency needs into a member, make him/her, through manipulation, experience and enact them, integrate them into his/her perceptual and value system, become receptive to these needs, and recognize their importance for the group, and finally promote them. The difference between these two purposes is that in the first case, the group fakes change to avoid it, and in the second case, the group tries to change the opponent member (generally the therapist), in order to maintain

the status quo. The following clinical material is an example from a diagnostic group (D-group) wherein the group has opted for the latter method to keep functioning under baD and have their dependency needs satisfied by the trainer.

### **Clinical Material**

The group was composed by 14 members (8 men and 6 females)—all first year students in psychology department—, a trainer (Tr), and two observers (male and female). Participation in the group was a part of the psychology curriculum and a required credit for the Certified Psychologist Diploma. The group was of a D-group type as developed and practiced by the author (Hafsi, 1990; 2000; 2002; 2004). The term "D-group" is an abbreviation of the traduction of Anzieu et al.'s (1984) "groupe de diagnostique", or "diagnostic group". D-group corresponds to a psychoanalytically-oriented T-group (Lewin, 1948). It has three main values, educational, experiential, and, eventually, therapeutic values. In other words, D-group provides the participants with an opportunity, first to learn about group process and different group aspects and phenomena (e.g., leadership, scapegoating, baG), learn how to recognize or diagnose them (educational value), by experiencing them (experiential value). This experience eventually allows also the participant to have an indirect feedback from other participants (including the trainer) about his/her way of combining and interacting with others in the group, or his/her valency, and about the effect he/she has on others. The participant may also consequently have an insight into the nature of his/her object relations. In pathological cases, this insight may eventually have a preliminary therapeutic effect (therapeutic value) on the participant, and lead him/her to seek further counseling, therapy or analysis. D-group comprises in general between 4 to 12 sessions of 80 minutes each; the one described below consists of six sessions.

#### **Session 1**

As usually seen in the first session, the group started by the trainer (Tr) defining the purpose, and explaining the basic rules of the group, the role of Tr and the two observers. After Tr has finished conveying these basic instructions, the group entered a period of a long silence which lasted more than 10 minutes. Meanwhile, Tr intervened twice, reminding the group that they were here to discuss about their experience of the group, and that they were free to talk about anything that may interest the whole group. However, these interventions had no effect on the group which kept silent. With the exception of those frequent proto-mental behaviors (Hafsi, 2003), such as cough, sigh, sniffing, sneezing, stretching, glances exchanging, there was no verbal and non-verbal communication. When suddenly, after a few sighs, stretching, and glances around and

behind him, G. put up his hand to ask for the permission to talk and said:

**G.:** "...I know everybody is thinking the same thing...it is very difficult...I really don't know what we are expected to do, but we have to start something...I hate this silence...the group is too dark...(then, addressing H.)...do you have any suggestion?"

**H.:** "...No...What shall we do...Shall we ask other members?...I am sure nobody has a suggestion...nobody will speak in this kind of atmosphere..."

**G.:** "...How about asking Tr for a suggestion? He must know more than we do...besides, group psychology is his speciality and we are here to be taught, aren't we?"

**M.:** " (a female participant)...I don't think he will help us...If he really wanted to help us...he would have done it before we ask him, because he knows that we can't do anything alone...(then addressing Tr)...I am wrong?"

**Tr:** "...I think that the group is attributing to me more power and ability than I really have... I have just met the group, so it's normal that I don't know anything about it...I also don't know what is good for this group and what the group should do here...As I have already explained, it is the group's task to think about these matters. My role here is to help the group understand what is happening, not doing the job on the behalf of the group...I will only feedback to the group what I have understood...if I can understand something of course..."

**M.:** "Which means that we can't rely on you...can we?...I see...I think everyone has got the message...We can't rely on Tr...we are not expected to rely on someone... (Then, ironically)...it is not like other classes...we have to do everything by our selves..."

Hence, Tr's interpretative intervention was interpreted as encouraging self-help and discouraging dependency. The group began to feel that dependency is "bad" or "improper" for adequate functioning as a group. This had negatively affected the group's self-evaluation, as reflected in the following statement by one of the members (M.):

"...I know that we should think, and talk here about this group experience by our selves, but I have no idea how, and about what shall we talk, we are not accustomed to this kind of teaching and learning...Anyway we have to do something...we have 5 other sessions left...if we come to sit and keep silent, it is a waste of time..."

Following M.'s intervention, the group tried to get out of the vicious circle they were trapped in by finding a theme to discuss, but all the themes proposed did not satisfy all the members. However, the group carried on vainly with this pseudo-work activity and search

for the right theme that will appeal to all, including Tr as fantasized by the group, until the end of the session.

## **Session 2**

The second session began by Tr conveying to the group that the rules are the same, and that the group are now invited to discuss about whatever interests the group. Like in the previous session, there were a few attempts to think about what task the group should assign to itself, however they did not last long. For the group plunged again into a long silence which was interrupted from time to time by a cough, sigh, and sneezing. However, in spite of this lack of manifest activity and communication, there was a clear evidence (remarked also by the two observers) of an "unconscious alliance" (Anzieu, 1984) between the members. It was also obviously clear that silence was becoming unbearable, and the group was expecting Tr to intervene and help them get out of that painful situation, as a result of omnipotent denial, and idealization (Klein, 1946) of Tr. Contrary to the group's expectancy, Tr, who has sensed the group basic assumption of dependency, intervened again, confronting the group with this idealization and expectancy. He interpreted saying: "I think that the group is attributing to me omnipotent abilities which I really don't own...I am expected to come with a magic solution to help the group, because I am perceived as having these abilities..." This interpretation has for effect to stir disappointment, strengthen further the group's alliance, and stimulate again the group towards a pseudo work activity. D., who until now was continuously gazing at Tr like a devotee expecting benediction and guidance and from his master, intervened saying:

"How long are we going to keep silent and stay like this...(and in a disappointed voice) I think Tr will not help us...Let us forget him and start do something...we are only wasting our time...besides this time is not pleasurable...since we are here now let us enjoy ourselves...Does anyone have an idea about what to do...? (no answer)... Ok...How about introducing ourselves..."

Most of the participants agreed with him, and the group began introducing themselves clockwise. Given the futile information (name and department only) each one revealed about him/herself, it was obvious that members were not interested in knowing each other. Nevertheless, the group seemed very active, enthusiastic and united by the futility of this activity whose only purpose was, as understood later, to deny dependency on Tr. As a response to this sudden change in the group, Tr felt isolated from the group, and helpless. He was unable to understand what was taking place in the group, and react therapeutically. He had a feeling of being inhibited in his function as trainer and teacher,

and could not seek help from the group, because he felt the group had united against him, and consequently can not count on it for help. In a few words, he felt, for a while, trapped in a kind of impasse without the least change of escape, and decided thus to refrain from intervening and wait and see how the group will change.

However, after a while Tr began to feel that waiting was not the right attitude to deal with the group and his painful experience of isolation, helplessness, and unworthiness. He also began to feel that it is not only that the group was not willing to cooperate, but it was not mature enough to grasp the meaning of its behavior. He therefore decided to remind the group about the purpose and the rules of the group; something he did not do before with other groups. The group seemed very pleased to hear again the explanation and instruction, and asked various questions to which Tr answered without any hesitation and conscious resistance, like a teacher would do towards elementary school pupils. He also gave examples of discussion themes in order to help the group get out of the impasse and the repetitive self-questioning of "what shall we do, what kind of theme shall we discuss here". This kind of interaction between Tr and the group, which lasted until the end of the session, stirred in Tr an omnipotent self-confidence, and a feeling of having being able to help the group; a feeling which usually would rather alert him to his inadequacy as a trainer.

During the review meeting with the two observers held after each session, one of the two observers revealed that she felt that Tr's behaviour towards the group was very unusual. For, in other groups, he has always avoided responding to the group's dependency needs. The other observer felt that Tr was caught in a relationship where he played the role of a father caring for his children. This remark had first a painful effect on Tr; it was felt like a straight punch into his narcissism. However, it stirred also free associations that confirmed the accuracy of the remark. As a matter of fact, during his withdrawal, Tr had a number of fantasies. He fantasized that the members were as old as his son, and that like his son and most young people, they were too dependent, and immature to reflect on psychic matters, such as feelings, and other psychological phenomena which happens in a D-group. In spite of the difficulty of recognizing its failure to function adequately as a trainer, it was clear from these free associations that Tr had been playing a role in the group's fantasy, or *baD*. In other words, thanks to the feedback from the two observers, he became aware of the fact that he had been under the influence of the group's MPI and his own counterprojective identification (Grinberg, 1979). This awareness had a positive effect on, not only Tr's behaviour but also the whole group in the next session.

### **Session 3**

Like in the previous session, first the group tried to carry on with the pseudo WG

activity until reaching an impasse, then entered a period of a long silence. Meanwhile, Tr felt that the group will not be able to bear this situation anymore, and that if this continues the group will not learn anything from this experience. Therefore, he felt like he has to intervene to help the group but, unlike in the previous session, he could resist the temptation and desire to do it. Thanks to the insight gained in the previous session, he was able to understand the pressure he was feeling as a result of the group's MPI, and that it was aimed at making him experiencing baD and then manipulating him so that he plays a role of an omnipotent trainer or father which will satisfy all the group's, or his children, dependency needs. In other words, Tr could free himself from the grip of the group's basic assumption and distance himself from it, in order to avoid enacting it. This, consequently, enabled him to exert gradually (Hafsi, 1993; 1995) his containing function in Bion's (1970) meaning of the term. That is, first he tried to distinguish dependency needs projected on him by the group from his own needs. Then he tried to tolerate these needs within himself, without being disturbed by them. Finally, after sufficiently containing them, he could, thanks to his alpha function, translate or transform these needs, rendering them less frightening and more comprehensible. Then, after waiting for the right moment, he interpreted and confronted the group with them. As a result the group could understand these needs, identify with them and finally reintroject them without fear, and need to split them off. This was reflected in the group's decision (expressed by the then leader D.) that "the group should make by itself all the decisions about what the group should do and how it should proceed, and should ask for Tr's help only when this can not be avoided". As all the members agreed with this decision, the group decided to put it into practice in the next session, and they actually did it.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The concept of PI is, according to Spillius (1988), the most popular, and most fruitful kleinian concept, the only one which appealed to and was widely accepted and discussed by most of the different schools in psychoanalysis. To the point that it has degenerated into a "catch-phrase for all interpersonal phenomena" (Spillius, 1988; p. 196). In the present study the author has confined himself to a review of the concept of PI as conceived by the Kleinian school.

According to Klein (1946), PI is a defense mechanism the infant deploys against the experience of aggressive feelings, anxiety and fear of annihilation stirred by the presence of the death instinct within. PI consists in splitting off parts of the self, perceived as containing death instinct and therefore bad, projecting them onto and/or into the (partial or whole) object, and then identifying these bad parts with that object. Unlike projection, PI involves also manipulation of the (internal or external) object by making it experience

those projected parts, and behaving in accordance with them. The aim of PI is to avoid separation from the object, preserve one's self part from internal aggressor, and, according to Bion (1961) communicating actual experiences, and leading the recipient to play a role in one's fantasy.

PI is also used to understand group dynamics. There are many studies applying this concept to understand various group phantasy and phenomena, such as leadership, scape-goating behaviour, etc.. However, most of the authors have confined themselves to merely transferring a concept from one area (the individual) to another (the group-as-a-whole), taking no consideration of the specificity of each of these areas, and, consequently, providing no discussion on how PI, initially an individual process, spreads to the group-as-a-whole to become a group process. In the present study, the author has tried to describe the conditions and the process leading to PI in the group or mutual projective identification (MPI), through a description of how the baG, especially the baD, develops. It was concluded that baD is the result of 1) a mating of the members' personal dependency "pre-conception" (Bion, 1962) with a "negative realization", 2) the combination of the members through "dependency valency" and, 3) the consequent formation of an "emotional channel" linking members together, and 4) the members' resorting to MPI to evacuate their individual baD needs and desires, and as a result, 5) the transformation of these individual dependency "pre-conceptions" into baD, a group fantasy. As illustration, the author presents clinical materials from a 6-session D-group, in which the group resorted to MPI in order to get rid of its dependency needs and preserve them by, as put by Bion (1961), making Tr identify with, and enact them, and consequently leading him to play an active role in the group's phantasy.

In the first session, as a result of collective regression to the psychotic positions described by Klein (1946), the group resorted to MPI giving rise to baD. Then, the group tried to behave in accordance to baD and its characteristic expectancy of an "ideal breast-group" (Hafsi, 2000), behaving as if they believed that they need just to be physically present to have their dependency needs satisfied by Tr. However, as result of Tr's "surprise interpretation" (Anzieu, 1984) and his confrontation of the group with its baD, the group's expectancy or pre-conception could not be confirmed, or to use Bion's (1967) description, could not "mate" with a "negative realization". Consequently, the group gradually began to experience its dependency as an unwanted "bad part" of the self which should be discarded immediately if the group is to survive.

Confronted with a bad frustrating Tr, the group did not have other alternatives than simulateously splitting off its dependent part and dependency needs and projecting them into Tr in order to preserve them, and defend itself against separation anxiety. For, at this stage of the group development, separation of the group is unconsciously often equated

with annihilation of the whole group. The repetitive "what shall we do ?", expressed often by the group member when confronted by the trainer or when they have reached an impasse, reflects verbally this kind of separation anxiety.

As seen in session 2, the purpose of the group's MPI was to find a temporary niche for its dependency in Tr, and manipulate the latter so that he identifies with and preserve it by enacting or acting it out on the behalf of the group. This defence mechanism allows the group to remain as it, maintaining thus the status quo, and evading the painful experience inherent in real change or, as Bion (1970) calls it, "catastrophic change". In this sense, the change, or pseudo-work activity observed in the group as result of splitting off baD is a mere mock change, or "aberrant form" (Bion, 1961, Hafsi, 2004) of change which involved Tr as an extraneous actor.

Moreover, as a result of manipulation, a "parasitic relationship" was established between Tr and the group; a relationship, which according to Bion, led to a dependency group atmosphere (a third object) characterized by an inhibiting and consequently destructive effect for the the three, namely the group, Tr, and the third object itself. Owing to this parasitic relationship, the group managed to avoid the painful experience of thinking about, understanding, and processing its baD, an experience indispensable to development and change.

This relationship was a result of Tr's failure to contain, in Bion's terminology, the group's initial baD. He was unable to translate it into a less frightening baD, that is a baD the group (including Tr), could identify with and reintroject without fear (Bion, 1970). Hence, in stead of containing the group phantasy, Tr identified, as shown by his feelings of isolation, helplessness and unworthiness, with the group's baD, and tried to play a role by enacting it, and by trying to be receptive to and tolerant of baD and the group dependency needs in general. This fact is confirmed by Tr's fantastic perception of the group as, like his son, immature, and unable to deal with its difficulties without help.

Finally, thanks to the help (feedback) from the two observers, Tr was able, after the second session, to gain insight about the group's MPI and its manipulative behavior, and about his own unconscious reaction to it or counter-projective identification. This consequently helped him in the third session to regain and exert his containing and interpretative ability. That is, he was able to contain the group's baD, subject it to his alpha function, render it less frightening and more acceptable to group. As a result, the group became more tolerant of it, tried to understand it, could reintroject it as a "good" group-self part, indispensable to its conscious mental activity or the work group. This led the group to break from the impasse in which it was stuck, and helped Tr to escape from the trap of the group's MPI.



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