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Transforming Self Through Group Dynamics

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“Membership in groups is inevitable and ubiquitous. All day long we interact first in one group and then in another. Our family life, our leisure time, our friendships, and our careers are all filled with groups” (Johnson and Johnson, 2000, p.14).

The groups in which we participate help construct our identities. For those – particularly women, people of color, gays and lesbians, the elderly, the physically challenged and the ethnically distinct – who participate in groups in which they feel oppressed or are considered low-power members, the construction of social identity becomes more complicated. These individuals often do not find the nurturance needed as members of these groups to create authentic social identities. In fact, just the opposite often occurs – an inauthentic social identity is created. In the search to discover this authentic social identity, one often finds oneself in a self-selected group in which the process of recreation of social identity can occur. This article will explore how the construction and reconstruction of social identity is shaped by the intersection of the characteristics of high-power and low-power members within a group.

Groups, Power, and Social Identity

There exists no clear agreed upon definition of what constitutes a group. Johnson and Johnson (2000, pp. 16-19) offer seven different options for consideration:

1. A group is a number of individuals who join together to achieve a goal.
2. A group is several individuals who are interdependent in some way.
3. A group is a number of individuals who are interacting with one another.
4. A group is a social unit consisting of two or more persons who perceive themselves as belonging to a group.
5. A group is a collection of individuals whose interactions are structured by a set of roles and norms.

6. A group is a collection of individuals who influence each other.
7. A group is a collection of individuals who are trying to satisfy some personal need through their joint association.

For purposes of this paper, all of the definitions are relevant ; however, it will be important to understand from which perspective the different types of groups discussed emanate. Of particular importance will be definitions four through seven.

In understanding definition five, which stipulates that a group is structured by roles and norms, power emerges as a key issue. The *roles* (positions within a group that carry with them anticipated behavior) and the *norms* (implicit or explicit beliefs, ideas, rules, values that govern what constitutes appropriate behavior, attitudes and perceptions within the group) ordinarily delineate who are high-power group members and low-power group members. Typically low-power members belong to traditionally oppressed groups in the larger societal context such as people of color, women, lesbians and gays, persons who are physically challenged. However, not enough research has been done on how these memberships play out in smaller group contexts. Particularly, the interface of the multiple factors of gender, culture, and ethnicity has received scant attention in group dynamics research literature. Issues of gender, and race and ethnicity, have been examined separately in the studies of group work practices (Davis & Proctor, 1989) but rarely from a multiple characteristic perspective. Nonetheless, the interplay of these salient attributes influences the dynamics of the smaller group.

Understanding the characteristics of high-power members and low-power members establishes a foundation from which to discern better the dynamics experienced in the groups in which both high-power and low-power members are present. The following table highlights the list of characteristics offered by Johnson and Johnson (2000, pp. 250-253) based on the work of Stole, 1978 ; Tjosvold, 1978 ; Tjosvold & Sagaria, 1978 ; Lawler & Yoon, 1993 and 1994 ; Gilbert, 1992 ; Murnighan & Pillutla, 1995 ; Lindskold & Aronoff, 1980 ; Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Epstein and Taylor, 1967; Ohbuchi & Saito, 1986; and Brehm, 1966:

In general, life is good for the high-power members. Things tend to go well for them and they are typically oblivious to the role that power is playing in their relationships. Low-power members usually know the role that power plays in their relationships intimately because it often prevents them from meeting their own goals. There are several strategies, however, that low-power members use to influence high-power members. Some of these strategies include

High-Power Characteristics	Low-Power Characteristics
Establish norms or rules in the group as well as severe penalties for attempting to change status quo.	Even with attempts to understand high-power behavior, often feel frustrated and uncertain because of its unpredictability.
Devalue the performance of low-power persons and often claim a role in the success of low power persons.	Perceive relationship to be competitive. Stifle criticism of and direct attention and communication to the high-power member.
Make fewer concessions in conflict situations, tend to avoid efforts involving Cooperation, conciliation and compromise And reject demands for change.	More compliant to threats when negotiating, make more concessions and tend to be more cooperative and less aggressive.
Uninterested in learning about the intentions and plans of low-power members and underestimate the degree to which the intentions are positive.	Distort perceptions of the positive intent of high-power members towards them. Unwilling to clarify position to high-power member.
Offer rewards to low-power members when they refrain from rebelliousness. Believe that low-power persons do not “know their place” and “rock the boat” out of ignorance and spite.	Ingratiation, conformity, flattery and effacing self-presentation to induce high-power members to like them and keep on good terms with them. Some resist attempts to be controlled.
Feel more secure than low-power members and tend to keep a psychological distance from them.	Experience psychological reactance or attempts to regain one’s freedom and control. Attraction, mixed with fear and sometimes dislike, towards high-power member.
React more strongly to a low-power Person’s harm. As Aristotle noted, people think it “right that they should be revered by those inferior to them.”	
View low-power persons as objects to be manipulated	Expect exploitation

building their own organizations and developing their own resources, allying themselves with a third party, using existing legal procedures, changing attitudes through education or moral persuasion, or using harassment techniques. Nonetheless, the power differential still is challenging and difficult to shift.

The power differential also influences how one acquires social identity as well. Kay Deaux (2000, p. 1) explains that Henri Tajfel developed social identity theory as a way to “explain the relationship between categorization and intergroup discrimination”. Social identity theory is often interpreted as a way in which people enhance their self-esteem through social identities constructed through the groups in which they belong. The desire to increase one’s self-esteem

often results in establishing in-groups and out-groups to establish favoritism or privilege. This differentiation usually results along social categories.

Deaux (200, p. 3) identifies five types of social identity categories : “relationships, vocation/avocation, political affiliation, stigma, and ethnicity/religion”. She goes on to discuss other ways of classification including : Brewer and Gardner (1996) who offer that the individual, the interpersonal and the group serve as the categories ; Klink, Mummendy, Mielk and Blanz (1997) identify cognition and emotion as two ways in which elements within the social identity category can differ ; The dimensions of individualism versus collectivism are emphasized by Brown et. al (1992) ; Prentice, Miller, and Lightdale (1994) make the distinction between social identities that are created as a result of common bonds and common identity ; and Ellemers, Kortekaas and Ouwerkerk (1999) posit that self-categorization, group self-esteem and commitment to the group are areas of division. Deaux concludes that this discussion demonstrates the complexity and nuance with which social identity can be explored.

Themes From Work Contexts

The following narrative excerpt is from interviews with two American women who experienced oppressive interactions at their respective institutions of employment in the United States. The interview participants each did individual reflections on their work experiences, followed by discussion. The pre-reflection expectation was that there would be few similarities in the patterns of oppressive work processes due to work culture differences as one was a faculty at a university and the other worked for a city commission. However, from their individual reflections on our work contexts and the follow-up dialogue reflections, commonalities surfaced immediately and unexpected patterns emerged. It is noteworthy that the dominant group functioned in chaotic modes in which salient oppressive features such as gender and race-bias surfaced frequently in patterns of communication. Women’s opinions were not elicited, nor were they offered by women who had lost voice and were silenced. The dominant interaction patterns were mainstream white male.

In the discussion about their reflections they considered how they functioned in the dominant group. In the process of being silenced, they recognized that they both shared a feeling of cognitive dissonance with the dominant interaction patterns, and rather than conform to those patterns, they cognitively, psychologically, and emotionally distanced themselves or withdrew from the dominant group. They further recognized that they both had taken their energy to the outer community where they joined, formed and/or facilitated groups of self-selecting

members of like-interests and identities. They recognized that this action was a coping strategy. The interaction in the self-selected groups provided validation and reconfirmation of their values and abilities. The following excerpt from their dialogue reflects those realizations.

Woman 1: You're right when you say that my voice isn't strong. I no longer give my energy to this university faculty. I noted in my Tavistock Group interaction that I don't stay with the group's agenda if it is not moving forward in my estimation.

Woman 2: Withdrawal or distancing is a coping strategy. When we did a group simulation of oppression within the curriculum of the Healing Racism Institute, several types of groups emerged, and one of them always was the withdrawal group.

Woman 1: I moved my energy out into the community. From about eight years ago I slowly became involved in facilitating gender and cultural discussion groups and am on the academic advisory board for the city's gender policy. I have gotten reconfirmation of my ability, and was able to create meaningful community in my life.

Woman 2: That's what happened to me, too. The work I did with the community and in the schools sustained me in the craziness of City Hall. I shifted out of cognitive dissonance through doing community work. I still am working in the community.

Woman 1: There's no other way to reconcile the dissonance. If the institutional support for change is not in place, one person cannot do it alone.

Woman 2: You're right. The situation will not change unilaterally. We choose not to buy into the existing structures. We are not willing to conform to the structure so we go out into the community to gather the strength and the strategies to become change agents.

The model explained in the next section reflects the analysis that was developed from the interviewees' discussion.

Explanation of the Model

This model of analysis represents a process of recreating identity when the norms and values of the dominant group oppress one's identity. Essentially, the dominant group imposes group values and norms on the individuals of the group, thus constructing the social identity of the individual members. Since "a group cannot exist, cannot survive, cannot function, and cannot be productive unless most members conform to its norms most of the time" (Johnson & Johnson, 2000, p. 263), conformity to the group norms and values is expected. If the dominant group is inclusive of differences, the individual will be able to function as a whole person. However, if there are patterns of oppression, through high/low power structures (Johnson &

Johnson, 2000), and the individual does not feel she belongs to the group in terms of value and significance, the individual's social identity (Haslam, 2001) will not be internalized in group membership.

When this happens, the individual often experiences a dissonance (Aronson, 1999 ; Johnson & Johnson, 2000) with her perception of her identity and the identity being imposed by the dominant group. The individual may begin to question her value and ability to function, lowering one's self-concept as a member of the group. When dissonance occurs, a common coping strategy for the individual is to distance or withdraw cognitively, psychologically and, when possible, physically from the dominant group. Kondo (1990) calls this distancing a deconstructing of imposed identity.

Recreating of identity can occur when the individual interacts in a self-selected group with similar identity characteristics. Definitions three, six and seven offer explanations of this group. People in a group share patterns that enable them to see the same thing, which holds them together (Hall 1973). Through interaction in like-minded groups, a positive social identity of oneself is restored. That is, one's membership in the self-selecting group has emotional significance and value to one's authentic social identity (Haslam, 2001).

Through support for one's beliefs and reconfirmation of one's authentic identity, the individual can gain strength to become a change-agent. With renewed hope, the individual can participate back in the dominant group in a recursive effort to bring about change to the norms and values of the dominant group. The individual works from a social creativity model (Haslam, 2001) to change the treatment and status of the marginalized within the group. In this process, the low-power members move from a dominant group experience in which a social identity is inauthentically created to a self-selected group experience in which the social identity imposed by the dominant group is deconstructed and an authentic social identity is reconstructed. This reconstructed social identity then provides courage for the individual to return to the dominant group with voice restored.

Discussion

Social identity is a critical mediator between group context, group behavior and individual behavior. "Where features of context lead a person to react to a situation in terms of a social identity that is shared with specific others, behavior will be qualitatively different from that which results where this identity is not shared" (Haslam, 2001, p. 55). Social identity is not

a static object, but a creative, ongoing process. Crafting selves implies a concept of agency, in which human beings create, construct, work on, and enact their identities, sometimes challenging the limits of the cultural constraints. Thus we should speak of ourselves in the plural as we navigate the many social identities which emerge from our experience in groups.

Social Identity Construction by Dominant Group

The definition that a group is “a collection of individuals whose interactions are structured by a set of norms and goals” (Johnson & Johnson, 2000, p. 17) is particularly useful in understanding how the dominant group constructs identity. As established, the ability of the large group to function effectively depends upon the majority of the members adhering to these norms and goals. It is important to note that not only do such norms, which translate into acceptable behaviors, beliefs and values, delineate high-power and low-power group members, but the regulation and structure of these norms is largely controlled by the high-power group. The result is a socialization process in which the identity of all members is constructed to conform to the characteristics of the dominant group. Haslam (2001, p. 54) points out that “it is precisely through individuals’ identification of, and conformity to, norms that are perceived to be shared with others in a particular context that their potentially idiosyncratic views become socially organized and consensual. It is through this process that individual views are coordinated [sic] and transformed into shared values, beliefs and behaviors”.

Sometimes low-power members do not internalize the norms as readily and the high-power members must take action to maintain control. One example of how the dominant high-power group maintains control is to offer rewards to low-power members when they refrain from rebelliousness. Woman 1 offers an example of this process within her faculty context. When younger male faculty criticize administrative procedures and decisions in faculty meetings, they are often given positions of power on committees and access to internal decision-making processes. The actual power realized by these male faculty is minimal ; however, the high-power members have succeeded in stifling the criticisms of the low-power members and have redirected their attention and communication to the high-power group.

In many ways the dominant group does not construct social identity for the low power member as much as it oppresses the social identity. This oppression is often witnessed in lost voice. For several years Woman 1 had been experiencing loss of voice in faculty meetings in which she participates as full faculty. She describes a specific incident that occurred in one meeting in which the of full faculty of approximately thirty members was meeting.

The faculty dean and chair of the meeting, a woman, in soliciting opinions from faculty members completely ignored one of the faculty members, who also happened to be a woman. None of the other female faculty spoke in her defense. I watched and waited for them to ask her to speak or for her to initiate speech, and even though I wanted to say something when she was passed over, I did not. I, too, was silenced by the awareness of the underlying pressures of gender-biased social norms which would surface in the following days in attitudes to encourage conformation. (The low-power characteristic manifested in this reaction is compliance to a perceived threat, and a stifling of my criticism to direct attention toward communication with the high-power members.) The anger I felt at the loss of not only my own voice but of all the women's voices was an indescribable dissonance. There was no outlet for that emotion in the moment.

Woman 2 shares a similar experience when she describes a situation with the restructuring process of a city Commission for which she was the Executive Director.

I vividly remember sitting in the Mayor's office with the Assistant to the Mayor and the City Manager and being asked how I thought the Commission should be restructured. While I had my own ideas, I knew that there were not enough perspectives in the room to make that decision, which is what I said. In hindsight, I realize that they interpreted that statement to mean that I did not have any ideas. Nonetheless, I was able to promote a participatory process involving several different voices for the restructuring process. Within the process though, my own voice got lost. We had had several meetings culminating in a big meeting in which all current and former Commissioners as well as the Restructuring Committee attended to make final recommendations. I still am shocked when I think back to this meeting. I finally received a job evaluation by some of the Commissioners ; it just came in the form of a press release. To say the least it was not very flattering. My anger had nowhere to go. I remained silent, which I knew for the process was best. Unfortunately that silence lingered. During the next few months, I noticed how often I was asked to speak up because people could not hear me. And I silenced my feelings by gaining weight. The silencing of my voice had literally silenced me and hidden my identity.

In terms of high-power and low-power dynamics, concepts of social identity are linked to the dominant group's maintenance of its power through exclusion and hierarchy. High-power

characteristics are evident in the actions outlined above in devaluing the performance of low-power persons, and viewing low-power persons as objects to be manipulated. These examples highlight how social identity is constructed and how voice (identity) can be lost in the process of that construction for low-power members.

Deconstructing Social Identity

In response to this loss of voice – authentic social identity – low-power members often seek ways to deconstruct this false social identity imposed upon them from the dominant group. Deaux (2000) discusses that people seek an optimal balance between differentiation from others and inclusion into larger collectives. This balancing process has been identified as the optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991, 1993). Deaux (2000, p. 10) goes on to explain that “the person who feels extremely differentiated will seek out a group or social identity that provides a greater sense of inclusion ; conversely, the person who is submerged in a larger group will look for more distinctive social identities to satisfy needs for distinctiveness”. The low-power person feels internally differentiated within the dominant group. This differentiation often leads the individual to experience dissonance with the social identity being constructed by the high power members. The individual undergoes a lowered self-concept of herself as a group member and seeks coping strategies to regain cognitive and psychological reconfirmation of her social identity.

A first step in this process of reconstructing an authentic social identity is to reverse the socially constructed identity imposed by the high-power group, by removing oneself from relationship with the dominant group. Interestingly, individuals often seek out groups in which they can find more inclusion of their authentic social identity. Therefore, for low-power members the balancing act becomes even more complicated as it is the larger collective that is advancing the differentiation which results in the need to seek a larger collective – the self-selecting group – for a sense of inclusion.

An approach for low-power members to deal with the internal conflict produced by their participation in the dominant group is to at least psychologically distance themselves from the dominant group. Kondo (1990) identifies distancing as a strategy to deconstruct imposed identity. In her analysis of herself as an ethnographer, she expresses that the fragmentation of herself and the collapse of her identity precipitated the distancing moment. It was necessary to extricate herself from her co-created identity with her informants in order to reconstruct herself in her American researcher identity. Gilligan (1993, p. 152) also suggests that distancing

allows the individual to protect her own knowing. She describes the distancing of one of the teenage girls in her study as process in which “for the sake of relationship and also for protection, she is disconnecting herself from others”. To remain connected to the relationship would mean a commitment to remain in conflict. The teen girl does not have the strength of identity at that moment to do it.

The *Encounter Stage* in Helms' (1990) Black Identity Model parallels this deconstruction process as well. In this stage, a Black person experiences an event or a series of events which calls into question her or his identity as a Black person and the state of Blacks in the United States. This encounter usually requires that the person not only experience the encounter, but that the encounter affects her/him in a personal way. Cross (1991) indicates that the encounter does not have to be a negative experience to function as the catalyst into this stage.

Many people in this stage may at first feel confused, depressed, or alarmed. “It can be a very painful experience to discover that one’s frame of reference, world view, or value system is ‘wrong,’ ‘dysfunctional,’ or, more to the point, ‘not Black or Afrocentric enough’” (Cross, 1991, p. 201). This stage is a time of transition, a shedding of the old identity and the initiation into a new one. Helms (1990, p. 26) states this leaves the person “virtually ‘identity-less’”.

Distancing is a mechanism of resistance. It allows the space for the deconstruction of inauthentic social identity to begin ; the ability to step away and see the larger patterns and discern where one fits.

Recreating Social Identity Through Self-selecting Groups

Deconstruction of the inauthentic identity, however, is not enough. One’s authentic identity must be reconstructed. Earlier in this paper several definitions of groups included one which identified a group as “a collection of individuals who are trying to satisfy some personal need through their joint association” (Johnson & Johnson, 2000, p. 19). This category of group formation is particularly relevant for low-power members who distance from the large group seeking reconfirmation of their social identity, values and beliefs through self-selecting groups. Gilligan (1993, p. 161) offers an excellent example of how this process happens :

Since there seemed no way to speak about these problems of relationship in the public arena, many girls had publicly agreed to an honor code that they did not believe in. And,

taking matters of public governance into their own hands, girls took them into a private world of relationships and settled them in private places, drawing on that psychological knowledge – that intricate physics of relationship – that girls learn by keeping an eye on the human weather and following the constant play of relationships, thoughts, feelings, and actions as it moves across the sky of the day.

It was through the smaller group relationships that the girls continued to find authenticity in their social identities and what they knew.

In Helms' (1990) Black Identity model, the *Immersion stage* serves a similar purpose of finding authenticity in one's Blackness. As she describes it in this stage, the Black person immerses himself or herself into the Black culture. This immersion is often reflected in dress, hairstyles, actions, or organizational memberships that depict an idealistic standard and authenticity of Blackness (Cross, 1991 ; Helms, 1990). This process is a powerful and dominating experience which is energized by "rage (at white people and culture), guilt (at having once been tricked into thinking Negro ideas), and a developing sense of pride (in one's Black self, in Black people, and in Black culture" (Cross, 1991. p. 203). Some people may also experience a heightened level of creative output, political involvement and altruism towards the Black community during this stage (Cross, 1991 ; Helms, 1990). The second part of this stage brings the person beyond the symbolic images of Black culture into a more concentrated understanding of the complexity of Black culture. She or he begins to discern the strengths and weaknesses of the culture and his/her Black identity (Cross, 1991 : Helms, 1990).

Convergence theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2000) explains that one reason individuals engage in collective behavior is because they have similar needs and personal characteristics. Convergence theory has been used to predict and explain crowd behavior as in protest demonstrations, but the theory appears to offer understanding as to why self-selecting groups with similar-minded members emerge as a way for individuals to find reclaim authentic identity. The group interaction makes possible the satisfaction of one's needs, which allows for the deconstruction and reconstruction of social identity through the release of previously controlled behaviors and beliefs.

Looking at it from high-power and low-power group dynamics, groups that are self-selecting tend to demonstrate less differentiation in the power status of group members. The group is created to share similar experiences. Through dialogue members reconstruct social identity.

They accomplish this through the support and reconfirmation of self they find in the self-selecting groups, which embodies similar norms and beliefs.

Woman 1, in reaction to her experience within her faculty meetings, has found shared social identity with community members through facilitating gender and cross-cultural discussion groups for long-term non-USA women residents. She has found validation for her beliefs and values as a human being in society, and more importantly she has found voice and is recognized in the community as a person of value. Woman 2 has sought and found similar validation in the community through her work with the Healing Racism Institute and her service on the Racial and Cultural Diversity community planning workgroup.

Individuals who have used self-selecting groups as a vehicle for reestablishing authentic social identity can serve a valuable function by recursively bringing strategies for transformation of the dominant group to become more inclusive of different norms and beliefs. This happens only through individual transformation and gaining one's authentic social identity. Mindell (1995) observes that resolutions sometimes occur after a break in large group work because smaller group interaction has occurred. He surmises that in the small group people experience a safe place to know themselves and how the problems being discussed at the center of the large group are related to themselves. When this authentic self emerges again it allows one the strength to return to the larger group as a change agent.

The earlier analysis of recreation of social identity depicts characteristics of hope, creativity and strength, which emerge from rediscovering authentic social identity. An analysis of these characteristics is most readily understood through the "concept of social creativity which is an aspect of a social change belief system" (Haslam, 2000, pp. 36-38). Social change beliefs are motivated by social-identity related concerns to clarify vague group boundaries in a system of social stratification that is perceived to be inauthentic. Finding one's authentic voice allows one to carry out this process more effectively.

Woman 1's experience with outside self-selecting groups, which through the reconstruction of her social identity, gave her courage and strategies to return to the university setting and expanded the discussion of gender issues. Specifically, she has given a public lecture on gender issues at the university, published articles on gender issues in her university's academic journal, has been instrumental in forming a self-selecting discussion group of like-minded female faculty. Woman 2's work with the community Healing Racism Institutes provided her with

the courage and voice to initiate an institute for city government employees, which began the process of questioning some of the structures within city government that perpetuate racism as well as individuals adopting new behaviors to break the cycle of racial conditioning.

Helms' (1990) *Internalization Stage and Internalization/Commitment Stage* also demonstrates how this process can work. At the *Internalization Stage*, Black people have a high salience for Blackness. This salience expresses itself through a nationalistic perspective at one end of the spectrum and a multicultural perspective at the other end. Cross (1991) identifies three functions that result from this internalized stage for the Black person : 1) source of a defense mechanism against the psychological harms of living in a racist society ; 2) establishment of a sense of connection, purpose and social grounding ; and 3) creation of a bridge for interacting with people, cultures and situations outside the boundaries of Black culture. There is definite sense of self-acceptance and pride. There is a shift from "uncontrolled rage toward white people to controlled anger towards oppressive systems and racist institutions from anxious, insecure, rigid, pseudo-Blackness based on the hatred of whites to proactive Black pride, self-love, and a deep sense of connection to, and acceptance by, the Black community" (Cross, 1991, p. 210). The *Internalization—Commitment Stage* extends the Internalization stage to include a commitment to execute a plan of action in Black affairs over a long period of time (Cross, 1991).

Summary

Initially the breakout to the self-selecting groups may be seen as a deterrent to the dismantling of oppression. How many times have people said, "I just don't understand why they need a separate group," when referring to groups such as the Black Police Officers Association or the Black USA Pageant or the Association of University Women. The advantages and purpose of the self-selecting group are that individuals have a space to understand their own oppression, abuse and privilege as well as reclaim their voice – authentic identity. The self-selecting group provides this outlet through the support of others who have similar values and belief systems. It brings clarity about what is happening in the large group. It allows patterns of oppression to emerge and creates opportunities to plan strategies to deconstruct these patterns internally and within the large group.

Going back to the dominant group brings with it a commitment to be in relationship with one's recreated identity. The "relationship" referred to by Gilligan (1993), and the "conflict" of Mindell (1995) are similar in characteristic. In Mindell's definition of conflict the reader's

mind is disabused of the traditional meaning of argument or disagreement. For Mindell conflict is bringing to the table alternative norms and values for discussion and eventual inclusion in the dominant group. Gilligan (1993) describes this conflict as arising from bringing one's authentic self forward which is in conflict with the norms and values of the group ; however, to be in authentic relationship with others one must bring one' s authentic self forward and work towards creating a space for all of our authentic identities to come forward to be valued. The true healing and meaning for the larger group occurs when the individual then returns to the larger group with optimism, hope and strength to "sit in the fire" and "burn the wood" (Mindell, 1995).

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