

Oral envy and networks

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Finland is a country located in the Arctic Circle. This means that in the winter we have a period of total darkness when the sun does not rise and, equally, in the summer, a period of total lightness when it does not set. In Finnish mythology, Kalevala, the wicked woman from the North, stole the moon and the sun and locked them inside a mountain. This is how all became dark (Anon., 2004).

The Tavistock was, in the 1980s, the buttress of my mental image, like the axis of the globe. This invisible structure allowed my life to spin on its orbit. At the Belgirate IV, I took part in the group that was studying the theme of “co-directing”.

This polar axis and its vertex—the Leicester conferences—represented a place in the world where one was not able to survive by relying on half-truths or lies, or on one lap where one always would be safe: Tavistock. This idea of security rested on my general conception of life, the good and evil of mankind, the powers of destruction, and the urge to construct (Graves, 1992).

Our generation was building up Tavistock to be very important and intended to make it strong. It symbolised our values, as does Mount Everest for mountain climbers, Robben Island for Africans, or the

church of St Peter for Christians. We happily laid the bricks of harmony, unity, closeness, security, and unanimity (Burleson, 2005). These were the building blocks for constructing togetherness.

Idealisation

The affiliation was vertical. Each had his or her own bond with Tavistock (Bion, 1948). We were holding in mind the wish to be the most talented child of the wise mother. Idealisation was the prominent defence against envy. At the time, this vertical structure provided benefits in various ways, as similar phenomena do elsewhere. It made it possible to preserve the feelings of security and to place the evil outside us (Bion, 1948). It made it possible to locate the feelings of helplessness and incapability in those who did not understand the psychoanalytical group processes or in the ones who had not been to Leicester. Evil is something that separates us, leaves us isolated, as in the Bible: God turns his face away from us.

It was not difficult to negate the awkward feelings of envy through idealising, as so often happens in the dependent groups (Klein, 1957). The Tavistock–Babel was imagined growing higher and higher towards the sky. Inevitably, we continued growing. We learnt more, developed gradually, matured, and went forward. The unspoken ambition was to rise as high in wisdom as the wise mother, Tavistock, and even higher. The struggle for the place on the lap led to the aspiration to grow inwardly. It activated the intention to climb up the ladder. By climbing higher, the space was diminished (Aram, 2012).

Back home, the basic idea of the Leicester conference was repeated and taught to the colleges. Many were building their own working conferences in their own cities. We wanted and achieved the opportunity to establish our own Leicester, exactly how we wanted, where we wanted, and precisely according to the vision we had. The house was occupied. All of this was now ours (Armstrong, 2005).

Interdependence

The vision turned out to be more difficult to achieve than had been imagined. It was not possible to put knowledge in one's pocket and

bring it home. Not everybody was interested in these unknown theories that we were so excited about. The freedom to build and to create was equally within everybody's capacity. None of us knew how to build alone (Poundstone, 1993).

We twiddled our thumbs. Some innovative people started to collect splinters from the floor. They manipulated them this way and that, trying to see what could be put together of these fragments of Leicester conferences. How one looked in the eyes of the sagacious mother no longer seemed significant. It became meaningless to look better than one's siblings in those eyes. Gradually, it became more important to learn how to co-operate with the littermates and how to build out of nothing. The survival and success of the venture turned out to be dependent on our helping and supporting each other.

It became vital to understand whom to trust or to work with. Regarding the desire for security, we were tossed on a stormy sea and had to rely on each other in creating the life-rafts.

We became a handful of die scattered out throughout the world: the Tower of Babel destroyed by God (Kahn, 1962). We belonged to different nations and races and spoke various languages. The common task was to create a connection to one another. It formed a general aim to fight against loneliness and separateness.

It became crucial to empathise with the associates with whom one was dealing. Previously, it had been possible to trust the approximation of the prudent mother. In the past, it was possible to be lulled into slumber by the entrance qualifications. The Leicester conference was operating like a gatekeeper who sieved the evil away. Despite the fact that we had learnt to understand at Leicester that evil is in all of us, the thought that it was possible to escape it by creating new defences still persisted. There still was less evil inside than outside the gate. The ones who wanted to recognise the evil in themselves were less evil.

Paradoxically, we did not know at the time how important it was to undergo acceptance of one's own helplessness and incapability. It was difficult to see what to do with this treasure of knowledge. Some wanted to formalise it as a degree and add it to their personal curricula. Others were happy with making it part of a portfolio. It was like walking on the crest of the wave of the world's development and then sinking into the water for some unknown reason. Speechless stagnation smothered the effects of joyful play. New challenges were

brought up on the journey. The deaf were listening to words that did not come out of the gagged mouths. We had to face each other. We had become significant to one another. We reached out our hands to each other, but found that the hands were disconnected from the limbs (Cooper & Lousada, 2005).

It became important to learn how to evaluate each other's abilities. Who is reliable? Who is capable of keeping boundaries? Who is able to direct a conference? Who knows how to mutually exchange?

Oral envy

The exceptionally difficult part was the fear of being utilised. Suppose the significant other steals our precious ideas? How is it possible to trust the other while fearing being used? We were arguing strongly that this might not be merely a groundless fear. In life, sometimes, ideas do get stolen. There was a longing for the sheltered environs of Leicester. The distribution of justice and even-handedness was ruefully missed. Climbing up the ladders had turned into rolling down the stairs. It was like the Three Bears in the fairy tale who were questioning the intruders: who has stolen my ideas? Who has taken my thoughts? The rivalry had degenerated into the green sludge of oral envy (Klein, 1957).

Like the blind touching and grasping to be able to form a picture of the surroundings, one had to learn to trust one's own instinct. One had to learn that one's eyes did not always see correctly (Toto & Hyypä, 2012). There was a lot of disillusionment in the associates. Although many felt betrayed by agreements, one was responsible only on one's own account. It became all the more depriving since there was no omniscient mother to accuse of the sudden lapse of attention. One had only oneself to blame for one's own blindness and unwise judgement.

Sometimes, evil was seen in places where it did not exist (Kernberg, 1994). It was humiliating to be confronted with being blinded by one's own envy. In those processes, one sometimes lost necessary resources or burned bridges that should have been left intact. Sometimes, one felt about to be crushed by shame.

There was quiet longing for the mother's consolation: never mind. One simply had to gather together the tatters of dignity and stand up again. Tavistock had been overpowered. The limits had been broken.

We had founded the global group relations network, but who knew what it really was?

Competition

At least it was wonderful to be inside. It felt worthwhile and prestigious to belong to the global group relations network. But who was outside of the network? For some to belong, there have to be others who do not (Klein, 1945). Who does not belong to a network that is expanding? How could the world be brought to understand group relations through exclusion? Or was it just about an inner circle? (Riesman, 1961). Was it about the qualification for some specialist know-how or a graduation certificate after all? If not that, how does one differ from those who do not belong to the network?

The scattered fragments of the Tower of Babel needed to become integrated. The Belgirate conference was founded. Belgirate was the place to safely disclose the creation of knowledge and thoughts. Evil could be located in the world outside the walls of the idyllic Italian hotel. At Belgirate, it could be possible to strive for the place in the lap of the good mother. At Belgirate, it could be possible to compete.

The success stories of hard work were proudly presented to one another. Many accomplishments in the outside world were described and the number of conferences attended was explicated: how many of these conferences had been directed, by whom, and what exotic places these conferences had taken place in. The education programmes were construed and the challenging work on which we had consulted was presented. We were eager to learn more.

At Belgirate IV, we started the group with enthusiasm about intelligently studying the subject of “co-directing”, chosen by us from the given possibilities. I chose this group because of my earlier studies in co-directing. We have a peculiar political situation in Finland, since the power of the president has been diminished to an extent that gives the impression that the prime minister and the president have been allotted an equal amount of power. This leads the large study group of the Finnish nation to be “co-directed”. In my article, “Who is directing Finland—or is anybody?” (Salmi, 2010), I am looking in depth at its influence on Finnish society, particularly from the point of view of its paralysing and destroying effects.

Deprivation

The atmosphere seemed to promise us that we were the bright children of the prudent mother. We wanted to tell this to each other.

At first, we did not really want to let it enter our consciousness that the group did not have a consultant. We had only each other. Carefully, we tried to gaze around: who has stolen the mother?

There is a thief here!

Quickly, we locked the door of our thoughts and pulled the curtains in front of our eyes (Maslow, 1972). We wanted to guard our ideas. We were afraid of thieves. We all wanted to be wise mothers or prosperous directors. But did we want to be co-directors? How can one share motherhood or be just a half a director? How can one be a gifted child of two mothers? How can one direct if one has to share the governance? Sharing is not directing.

We groped to perceive the theory of pairing as the basic assumption (Bion, 1948). No recollections reverted. We made an effort to discuss what we ought to talk over. The words just did not come out of our mouths. Co-directing—it was as if we had heard the idea for the first time and we understood nothing of it.

For some inexplicable reason we were paralysed and afraid (Menzies-Lyth, 1988). Is there a thief here?

Rage

Gradually, the stagnation passed. This was heard in the discordant protest about how Belgirate has turned into such an arduous place. People do not want to come here any more. This was agreed upon. We started enumerating the people who were not with us. This was nothing short of awkward: co-directing. We spoke about those of whom we had heard rumours of not wanting to come to Belgirate any more. We felt guilty. We were mourning. What went wrong? Why did we suffocate fresh creativity? Part of us felt envious of those who had stayed at home. They had indeed been right. We were ashamed to be stupid enough to come and to believe in this. This nonsense is never going to work.

We refused to understand that we did not want to understand.

Co-directing means one ought to share the leadership. How can we know while co-directing which one of us is better? Who is going

to justify us rightfully? The thoughts felt not so much unpleasant as impossible. Defensively, we claimed that we did not want to compete; we just wanted to show how skilful we were. Sometimes, we were overcome by indisposition. Where can we lodge the green mud of envy if we volunteer to surrender to exploitation? None of us wanted to admit any desire to take something from somebody else: a brochure, a programme, an idea? We happily projected this out of ourselves and whispered in the corridors like the three bears in the fairy tale: there might be someone here who just came to look for something to steal. We thought rationally about how indeed there might be such people somewhere, but we had to keep on building regardless of it. How could we direct anything at all if we allowed our thoughts to be cloaked in secrecy? Anyhow, these fantasies were all too risky to be expressed aloud in the group and not one of us was able to say anything.

The air between us was thick and black like smog.

Utilisation (paranoid–schizoid position)

At Belgirate, we were people from all over the world. In short-lived light moments in the co-directing group, we spoke of South America, Australia, Italy, and the USA. We flew with the power of our thoughts from one variegated culture to another. Our grey, ordinary, everyday life was transformed into the shimmering wings of a colourful butterfly. We almost felt how it might feel ascending, flying into the air as if lifted up by the thoughts of our group members. Unexpectedly, however, our feet became heavy, like stones. We felt as if we were sitting glued fast to our chairs like the broken pupa of the larva, which falls to the ground empty after having delivered joyful life from itself.

We had been defeated (Klein, 1957). We had become hollow.

Mourning (depressive position)

Co-directing supposedly means to direct together, to share the leadership. Who will take the credit? Our intelligent study of co-directing had resulted in painful feelings of loss. Our envy had made us feel empty.

One member of our group claimed to be feeling like a discarded peel. The work in the group was like giving life to a carefree butterfly. It would neglect us and fly away (Ogden, 1988).

Another member of our group smiled and said, "Hopefully."

A ray of sunlight pierced our thoughts. The wings of a dragonfly were illuminated. Life is born out of love. Love means giving and sharing, not keeping it to oneself (Klein, 1957; Sauer et al., 2010). We discovered that this is how it is meant to be. The prince gave life to Snow White, who was poisoned by the apple of envy, by kissing her. The blood started to circulate in our feet again. We felt alive and able to dance joyfully. We started talking, giving and taking, exchanging ideas and thoughts.

The air in the group was full of little butterflies, flying up and down, back and forth with their tremulous wings. The ray of light had refracted our feelings into all colours of the rainbow.

Sharing is prohibited by early feelings of envy (Klein, 1957). These early feelings are introjected in our desire to grab from others and projected in our fears of being molested. How can we share if we are afraid of thieves? How can we co-direct if we are afraid of sharing? How are we able to contain our inner and outer integration under pressure in groups?

When the structure in groups turns from hierarchical into vertical, a major amount of oral envy is always released into interpersonal relations. At this time, envy often transforms the atmosphere from idealisation into the fear of utilisation. How can it be possible to get the group working if interaction is prohibited by the ambivalence created by the fear of utilisation and the urge to steal? The solution and outcome through competition was frustrated since there was no clear management to evaluate and deliver imaginary credit. This is a major challenge in all the non-hierarchical organisations that are so popular in our postmodern society. My background is in healthcare organisations. They always contain both hierarchical and vertical elements in their structures. There is deep complexity in all networks that are constructed in horizontal forms.

Working

Our "co-directing" group was deprived because it had no director or consultant. Among other difficulties, the group had to deal with the

feelings of oral envy while trying to work. The subject we were talking about was co-directing. It contains a complex form of competition. The co-directing pair as a director is a complex structure in groups in many respects. It affects the basic assumption of pairing. Co-directing is not supportive to the outcome of the group to deal with its envy by working via constructive competition. Our group had at least three major aspects to look at.

1. The group needed to see itself as working without a consultant.
2. At the same time, it had to empathise with a complicated form of directing: "co-directing".
3. Simultaneously, it was necessary to keep in mind Bion's basic assumptions, both within the group working here and now and, imaginarily, how co-directing in general would influence the basic assumptions of the group.

This resulted in the group becoming largely paralysed.

What was particularly interesting in our work was learning that there was very little splitting, just some isolated comments. (This happened when Eliat Aram came to observe our group. Just this imaginary drop of "directing" got us to work by splitting (Kohut, 1996).) In relation to frustration, it was notable how the flight/fight aspect was generally absent in the study group.

In the end, the key solution in our group was not so much the studying of the subject given to us, but observing ourselves and our own working in a group without a consultant. After facing our own primitive envy and the emptiness it brought us, we accepted the inevitability of giving if one intends to work (Klein, 1957). By experiencing our own loss and helplessness, we overcame our stagnation and regained our creativity.

We went on working with the problems of how we contend with our envy. How is it possible at the same time to encourage and support the co-director we are taking on?

The stagnation of thoughts and the silence in the words: at times, we felt it to be the art of the impossible. How do we build and how do we provide input to the joint constructing? We are predisposing ourselves to the threat of abuse while working by creating, whether or not we are co-directing. How do we tolerate our own urge to steal from one another? How do we combat our fierce urge towards rivalry? How is it possible to keep all these controversies alive and

integrated in us at the same time? How is it ever possible to grow through all this? How do we construct the essential confidence in one another, to love, to create, and to keep on building.

No longer were we screaming, "Where is our wise mother?" We now had each other (Klein, 1957).

Continuity

We spoke about the next Leicester conference. Mannie Sher and Eliat Aram would be responsible for it. We exchanged information about the future working conferences in Spain, Germany, or Finland. We reached out towards each other. We were structured around an axis: Belgirate. At least for one moment we had reorganised ourselves into a structure that had both vertical and horizontal elements: our mother Tavistock and our interdependence on each other. We felt content.

We had rammed into the wall through our own urge to compete. We had collided with our own quality requirements and our appetite for exclusion. We had faced our feelings of abuse and stealing. We had confronted the feeling of our own emptiness. Inside us, we felt like the beautiful phoenix rising from the ashes. We had conquered our own urge to destruction.

Conclusions

In the aeroplane, flying back home, I felt the wings of the plane shaking. I was reminded of the little shivering wings of the swarm of colourful butterflies that filled the air in our group.

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