

Handout on History- Worldwork Sydney

Gary Reiss

Dealing with History as a Past Phenomena—

History needs its time to be described, witnessed, acknowledged, reacted to, and represented as some kind of experience in the moment. There are several main group processes that come up around dealing with historical events and times.

There are many different group processes around history. Some of these are:

- Avoidance
- Processing trauma-- shock, hurt and rage
- Fights over different versions of history
- Historical revisionism—the denial and rewriting of history
- Revenge as a reaction to history
- Becoming lucid around history— processing the past as you experience it in the moment

History as a Description of What is Happening Right Now

From a Worldwork standpoint, collective life is like an ongoing dream, and the past is used to describe what is happening in the here and now that isn't identified. So if I for example am talking about fear of speaking up in some of what was once the Soviet Union, this is both a historical experience to be processed, and a momentary description of what somehow must be present in the moment. The KGB, the Soviet Government, the one who is afraid to speak up, and the one who risks speaking up must somehow be part of the current moment also, since they are mentioned in the moment.

Addressing the Future Through History—

Working on history can be preventative medicine to prevent the recycling and repeating of history. The future is in the hands and the shared responsibility of each individual and group. History acts like a symptom that if not addressed, amplifies the next time around to up the chances of people waking up to the process. The skill applied here is to address issues when the waves are at low tides, so that it doesn't have to be taken care of at high tides. Addressing issues like this at a lower tide may help prevent higher tides in the future, and in particular is a way to prevent unnecessary violence.

How History Affects the Levels of Worldwork

We can focus on:

I. Impact on the **individual** level in a group

1. Our own personal history and how that effects who we are in the world. For example, how did our own suffering close us down, make us more compassionate, give us spiritual power etc. For example, your history may make it impossible to speak up or to be quiet in groups.
2. Our own family history, this generation and past, and how that impacts our beliefs, feelings, and actions in the world.
3. Our collective history, where we came from, our racial, gender, ethnic, national roots, religious and how this effects us around Worldwork Issues

II. Impact on the **relationship** level in a group

1. How much of relationship conflicts are a dance between our personal histories. For example, we are having a conflict, but it is really both of us in conflict with an abusive parent or whatever.
2. The impact of our family histories, their style, multi generational issues, and how this patterns our relationships in Worldwork, that is how my family history collides, interacts with your family history.
3. Our collective histories and how these are played out in relationship conflicts in the Midst of Worldwork. One example might be that two people get into a argument about who gets to speak, but behind this is the agony of each of their people's histories, both feeling like they are marginalized and must fight for their space in a group.

III. Impact on the **group** level in Worldwork

1. How is my personal history not just personal, but a shared group phenomenon, and therefore how does my personal work on this history help or hinder the group process in its unfolding.
2. How is my family history dreaming up the group to become like my family, and how is "my family" history a shared group process that is being worked on.
3. How is my collective history related to the group process, for example, if I am part of a Worldwork group in Eastern Europe and I come from a collective and family history of pogroms and the Holocaust, how is this dreaming trying to come into the group through me, to get the whole scene to focus on it.

IV. Larger societal level

1. How my personal history is not just personal, but my being impacted by and channeling into the group larger social issues, with implications way beyond the individual group. For example, if I want people to work on the racism that I have experienced and been hurt by, I am a channel for race being worked on in the group.
2. How my family and relationship history are reflecting processes that influence my group experience, and how my family issues are part of larger social issues, and changes in the existing social structures that are coming up in group process. Also how my individual family processes are world issues, the world dreaming through my family living room. For example, if I start to react to a group for being very hierarchical, this could be because of my family history, but also is bringing up larger social issues about leadership and power.
3. How my collective issues not only related to my collective past, but to issues affecting all of humanity. For example, how if I have a family Holocaust background, this is not only my people's issue, but a larger world issue that this history is trying to bring forward surrounding violence, hatred, and genocide.

History and Process Structure

Max Schupbach

Process Work theory suggests that history is a ghostrole, an organizing tendency in the field that structures the relationships between other roles in the field, potentially creating relationships between community members and bringing them closer to one another. Like all ghostroles, history is non-local; present in the past, the now, and the future. History and our experiences of time are frequently related to rank experiences, in which we have either been in the role of the marginalized/oppressed, and are looking for revenge, or we have been in the role of the marginalizer/oppressor.

Classically, history can be viewed as a continuous shuffling between roles that remain fixed. Our past/present oppression justifies our feelings of revenge and our drives to settle a score or claim what is rightfully ours. In the process of getting there, we marginalize the opponent, setting the stage for the next round. As Gary writes in the earlier section, this can play out on the personal, relationship, group and national levels.

In Process Work terms, this phenomena of fixed roles is also referred to as community symmetry. Community symmetries are an unconscious expression of our mythical ties, represented by an Anthropos figure that embodies and signifies an experience of being part of an unbroken whole. We are constantly making role switches organically in our flickering quick experiences of what it is like to be other. In the words of a Muslim Imam: "it is not possible to dig a grave for an enemy without seeing oneself in it for a brief moment." The switch between these two roles is central to understanding the structure of group processes around history and its cycling.

The process of making the ghostrole visible allows group members to relate to it through their own personal experiences. This breaks a group culture or presence in which the trauma and pain is marginalized, and opens the dreaming space. In context of this ghostrole, dreaming means interaction around the pain and trauma that was/is/will be.

Resolution of history appears on a structural level, when the roles of the perpetrator and the victim are shared. As a result, the sentient essence of the process can be experienced. Around historical processes, this essence is often perceived as the deeper meaning of it all. Understanding how our suffering and that of our ancestors is meaningful allows us to notice that their suffering was not in vain, but an important contribution to the evolution of consciousness within the global community. This is one of the ways that individuals and groups can transcend revenge. Victor Frankl describes this process in his work, in which he claims that meaning makes suffering bearable, and also creates a new space in which the trauma need not be repeated. Trauma, from this viewpoint, has an ally function, pulling members into its field, till its meaning is revealed and made known. This is often connected to the myth of an organization, tribe=nation, or family. Myths are essences, and as such are timeless, yet need to be relived and reformulated in many ways in order to stay fresh and alive.

SMALL GROUP EXERCISE FOR WORLDWORK SYDNEY

INNER WORK – 10 MINUTES (this is an exercise to help you find the essence of a historical rank that you have. Please feel free to skip it or change it as feels right for you, or replace it with this morning's inner work exercise)

1. Think of world history, and find one aspect of your own historical identity in which you belong to a group that is full of rank and hasn't always stood for it, or has used it to marginalize or oppress other groups. It might be your nationality/ethnicity, age, class, gender, health, sexual orientation. Please focus on one for this exercise. You might for example work on your rank in history as a colonizer, or as an adult, or as a heterosexual person, and how it was used to oppress others.
2. Imagine an ancestor figure that was an oppressor. Notice the energy that goes out from that role and make a hand movement that shows that energy.
3. Make that hand movement a few times, till you understand its essence or deeper transformational meaning. For example, if your ancestors have fought war, you might make a cutting down movement with your hand. When repeating it a few times, you might find that the deeper essence of this movement is decisiveness, or courage. This is an inner ancestor that lives with you.
4. Think of this deeper transformational meaning as heritage that can be lived by you and consciously used, and think about how you can use it this afternoon in your small group.

GROUP WORK

- A) Ask for facilitator volunteers or spin the pen if no one comes forward. Take five minutes to sort for a topic to work on.
- B) Work as a group on the topic that you sorted out for twenty minutes. Stop briefly – a minute or two - and relate back to your inner work. Notice how your inner ancestor is doing, and ask her for advice if needed
- C) Complete Group Process

DEBRIEFING 10 MINUTES

- i) Think of your inner work, and discuss briefly with a neighbor - 5 minute each - about how the group process was meaningful in terms of your relationship with your own history that you worked with in the inner work exercise before the group process.