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# After the Towers Fell: Terror, Uncertainty, and Intersubjective Regulation

*Doris Brothers*

As news of the falling towers pierced the stillness of my west side Manhattan office, all that once felt strong and solid seemed suddenly insubstantial. Even the walls lost their sheltering thickness. They could no more block out the horror of what happened some 7 miles away than the walls of the doomed towers could withstand the screaming impact of the hijacked planes. Would I ever again feel safe behind these walls, I wondered. Would I ever feel safe anywhere?

My sense of the impermanence and fragility of much that I hold dear deepened over the next several days. I was disturbed to find that my confidence in myself as clinician, the mainstay of my self-experience, became increasingly unsteady. Reeling from many of the same crushing blows as those in my care, I worried that I might not feel strong enough to stand beside them in their grief and terror. At least for a time, my therapeutic relationships seemed to become more symmetrical as my patients and I found ourselves sharing equal space in our existential boat. Quite a few of my patients expressed concern about me. Had I lost anyone close to me? Was I feeling overwhelmed by the heavy demands now placed on me? "Take care," many said as they left sessions, "Take care."

Conversations with friends and colleagues soon convinced me that my feelings were widely shared. Let me paraphrase the sentiments I heard expressed in various ways over and over again: "Nothing will ever be the same; the world is a different place now. I have no idea what to expect. What will happen to me? What will happen to my loved ones?" These expressions of overwhelming uncertainty had a special and powerful resonance for me. For the last few years, uncertainty as a fundamental and pervasive aspect of the human predicament has claimed my interest. I have written several papers on uncertainty and its intersubjective regulation (Brothers), and, only a few days before Sep-

tember 11th, had been offered a contract by Brunner-Routledge to write a book on this topic.

Suddenly the matters I planned to consider in a cool, scholarly way seemed to grab me by the throat. I could not help but apply the thinking I had done before September 11th to what I experienced afterwards. While my approach is only one among many ways to make sense of the psychological effects of the terrorist attacks, my experiences inside and out of my clinical practice since then have not only clarified certain aspects of my thinking and transformed others, they have encouraged me to believe in their usefulness.

In what follows, I will attempt to show that the need to regulate uncertainty claimed urgent priority for many people affected by the shattering impact of terrorism. I begin by describing the realm of uncertainty I find relevant to psychological life and the systems approach I use to explore it. Next I explain how I view trauma in terms of uncertainty and its intersubjective regulation. I then describe uncertainty regulation in terms of two motivational strivings that emerged in many intersubjective contexts after the attacks: (1) a search for sameness and (2) a search for difference. Finally I provide a clinical example in which these practices assumed great prominence in my therapeutic relationship with a trauma survivor.

## UNCERTAINTY AND SELF-EXPERIENCE

While the concept of uncertainty has been used in a wide variety of contexts—in physics, for example, it is often mentioned with respect to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, which states that the momentum and position of a particle cannot both be precisely determined at the same time—I am concerned with uncertainty as it pertains to human experience. Despite the seemingly tenuous connection between uncertainty in the physical sciences and uncertainty as a human expe-

rience, a new scientific paradigm that takes uncertainty very much into account is now being applied to psychological phenomena by a number of prominent psychoanalysts (e.g., Beebe and Lachmann; Coburn; Stolorow; Sucharov). Developed in physics, chemistry and mathematics, and later extended to the study of biology, this new paradigm is usually referred to as nonlinear dynamic systems theory, chaos theory, or complexity theory. According to Esther Thelen and Linda Smith, psychologists who have applied the principles of dynamic systems to early human development, these principles “concern the problems of emergent order and complexity: how structure and patterns arise from the cooperation of many individual parts” (Thelen and Smith xiii).

Unpredictability and disorder are inevitable aspects of evolving dynamic systems. Consider how Thelen and Smith describe change in what are known as open systems: “Emergent organizations are totally different from the elements that constitute the system, and [the] patterns cannot be predicted from the characteristics of individual elements” (Thelen and Smith 54). Thus, when psychological phenomena are regarded from the perspective of systems theory, uncertainty is implicit.

Insofar as I endorse the assertion that human experience is systemically constituted, I believe that experiences of uncertainty—and certainty, for that matter—emerge and evolve intersubjectively within relational systems. Since a living system has been shown to contain subsystems and to interact with other systems to form suprasystems, we may focus on experiences of uncertainty that pertain to dyadic systems, particularly the analytic partnership, to a subsystem involving an individual’s experience, or to a suprasystem involving the society as a whole. However, we must bear in mind that no one component exists independent of the others.

I am chiefly interested in examining uncertainty at what I believe is a very experience-near level insofar as it involves the survival of one’s sense of self. Self psychologists, intersubjectivists and relational analysts tend to agree that a sense of vital and cohesive selfhood emerges and is maintained in the context of relational experiences (self psychologists call these selfobject experiences) throughout the life span.<sup>1</sup> However, we can only trust in the availability of such experiences; our

birth certificates come with no guarantee that they will be forthcoming. Thus, as I see it, uncertainty about psychological survival is a fundamental aspect of the human condition.

Relational experiences with caretakers during formative years convince some people that their psychological needs will always be provided for in a trustworthy way. Such fortunate individuals are not likely to experience debilitating uncertainty about their psychological survival. Indeed they may regard confrontations with the unknown as greatly pleasurable and find a wondrous challenge in the realization that we are born, live our lives, and die amid untold mysteries. They are apt to delight in engaging in creative or risky activities that heighten their sense of uncertainty. In contrast, people for whom relational experiences were inadequate, insufficient, inconsistently available, or traumatically disrupted, are likely to find uncertainty about psychological survival a matter of urgent and ongoing concern.

It is probably apparent that even with optimally responsive caretakers, children are bound, at times, to feel uncertain that their relational needs will be met. The experience of such uncertainty seems, from earliest infancy on, to lead to attempts at its regulation. My reading of the literature on infant research has persuaded me that much of the self and interactive regulatory activity of infants and their caretakers involves the regulation of uncertainty. Even very young infants, this research suggests, show intense interest in contingent relations and are powerfully affected by the confirmation and violation of expectancies. As Sander notes, infants are intrinsically motivated to order information, detect regularity, and generate and act on expectancies. Moreover, he asserted that all of their activities must be coordinated with that of their caretakers. I view the coordination of gaze, vocalization, and affective expression observed to occur between infants and their caretakers as early modes of intersubjective uncertainty regulation insofar as such coordination provides means by which both members of the dyad feel assured that their relational needs will be met. Uncertainty, I want to emphasize, is not always regulated in ways that reduce its experience; the regulation of uncertainty often involves its being heightened. Think of the joy many babies find in games of “peek-a-boo.”

As Beebe and Lachmann suggest, “principles of interactive regulation documented in infant research have analogues in adult treatment” (*Co-Constructing* 480). I believe that an important aspect of adult interaction, inside and out of the consulting room, also involves the intersubjective regulation of uncertainty. Moreover, I believe that such regulatory processes assume particular prominence in the context of trauma.

### TRAUMA AND UNCERTAINTY REGULATION

Although my understanding of trauma has undergone considerable transformation over the years (Ulman and Brothers; Brothers), what has remained constant is my conviction that trauma profoundly disrupts the sense of vital, cohesive selfhood that emerges in the context of relational experiences. In 1995 I proposed that what lies at the heart of many traumas is the experience that one’s trust in oneself and/or in needed others to provide these requisite relational experiences has been betrayed (Brothers). I have since come to understand that a traumatically betrayed person may experience an intolerable sense of uncertainty that relationships with others will provide experiences essential to psychological survival (I believe this is what Kohut meant by his expression, “disintegration anxiety”). I now believe that restorative efforts in the aftermath of traumatizing betrayals often involve strenuous and, at times, drastic efforts to regulate uncertainty. When we attend to the subsystem of self, which for our purposes involves the ways an individual trauma survivor might regulate uncertainty, we might observe that he or she follows invariant daily rituals, adheres rigidly to tradition and orthodoxy, and otherwise avoids unpredictability at all cost.

On the other hand, experiences of certainty are not always pleasurable. As Becker pointed out, the certainty of death often serves as a mainspring for activity designed to avoid facing the inevitability of that vast unfathomable frontier. And, the need to avoid knowing with certainty that some horrible event occurred may contribute to the dissociative alterations of reality experienced by some trauma survivors (Brothers). Indeed some trauma survivors seem to court uncertainty as they embark on one risky pursuit after another (see Brothers on bi-directional reactions to trauma).

While uncertainty regulation among people who

have suffered severe traumas is likely to have a pressured, intense, driven quality, virtually any sort of intersubjective experience may have uncertainty regulating meanings for the people involved. Under ordinary circumstances these meanings go unnoticed as part of the texture of life. If you have ever attempted to ward off misfortune by knocking on wood or performing other superstitious acts, or tried to deal with the unfamiliarity of people different from yourself by drawing on stereotypes, or engaged in risky behaviors to enjoy a sense of excitement and adventure, it is likely that you engaged in some form of uncertainty regulation.

In my effort to describe my understanding of uncertainty regulation I have found it expedient to group common uncertainty regulating practices in terms of motivational strivings that emerge in intersubjective contexts, many of which are highly congruent with the five motivational systems identified by Lichtenberg. Before we consider two such strivings (1) the search for sameness and (2) the search for difference and the forms they took after September 11th, I must stress that I do not regard uncertainty regulation as the only possible meaning of what I describe; each is likely to hold multiple meanings. Moreover, these practices are not mutually exclusive and may occur simultaneously. Please note that my discussion shifts fluidly among the suprasystem of societal regulation, the system of dyadic regulation and the subsystem of self-regulation, and that all are interrelated.

### THE SEARCH FOR SAMENESS

The more we experience other people as like ourselves the more we tend to believe that we can accurately predict whether or not they will meet our relational needs or if we will meet theirs. Thus it appears that interactions between people that allow for the emergence of experiences of sameness would assume high motivational priority as uncertainty regulating practices. Among self psychologists, the search for sameness would very likely be thought of as a need for the self-object experience of twinship Kohut suggested that experiences of likeness provide a sense of security as one feels oneself to be “a human among humans” (*How* 200). To the extent that the search for sameness leads to selfobject experiences I would link it with Lichtenberg’s “attachment-affiliation” motivational system.

When the need to reduce uncertainty is not very urgent, we may simply notice the ways in which we resemble another person or persons, or we may discuss with them what we believe to be our shared tastes and personal qualities. However, in the throes of uncertainty over psychological survival following a traumatizing betrayal we may feel such a strong need to overcome experiences of strangeness and unfamiliarity that differences between us and others are denied and the expression of difference is suppressed.

As I now recall the first harrowing hours and days following the terrorist attacks, I believe that searching for a sense of sameness and unity was an aspect of the initial reactions of many New Yorkers. First, I remember the urgency with which we told and retold our accounts of where we were, what we experienced, and how we reacted when the towers were struck. Not only did we reassure one another that we shared the same fate as survivors, but I believe that in the simple acts of recounting and listening we served as witnesses for one another, and thereby reinvigorated a sense of kinship and community. We demonstrated our shared willingness to provide basic relational experiences on which our sense of human-to-human connectedness depends.

Many people reported feeling “glued” to the television, radio, and internet for news. While we undoubtedly tried to relieve our uncertainty by gathering as much information about what had occurred and was likely to occur as we could, I also wonder if the awareness that hundreds of thousands of other people were receiving the same information at the same time served to increase a sense of unity and sameness.

Even more impressive in this regard was the ubiquitous flying of the flag. As Prentice and Miller suggest, “people displayed the flag to signal patriotism, sympathy for the victims of the attacks, and solidarity with their neighbors, coworkers, and fellow citizens” (352). In their view, these en masse unfurlings were “self-presentations directed to the ingroup and perhaps also to the self” which produced “homegrown stereotypes.” And as they note, “they were interpreted, by the media and by Americans themselves, as evidence that Americans are a very patriotic and unified people” (352). To my mind, because so many people had chosen the same means of demonstrating their unity, they felt united by action as well as by sentiment.

Another aspect of the search for sameness involves clinging to the tried and true. In spite of choking ash and loss of electric power, elderly people in a building near ground zero agonized over their decisions to leave their homes. One woman told members of a Red Cross team that she could not bear to leave behind her cherished mementos of a world that no longer existed. Several of my patients who lived far from the site also reported that they found it difficult to leave their apartments. They seem to have attempted to regulate uncertainty by lingering in familiar surroundings after their worlds had been turned upside down. A 26-year-old male patient of mine who had been on the brink of ending his relationship with a woman he viewed as timid, clingy and overly dependent on him had, in the days following 9/11, a sudden change of heart. In discussing his reasons for staying with this woman, he said, “I know her like a book—what she’s going to say and do before she does. I can’t imagine being with a stranger at a time like this. I always complained that she didn’t want to go anywhere new or try new things. Now I’m glad she wants to stay home all the time.”

Many patients reported eating and drinking without restraint. Several who had prided themselves on lessening their dependence on alcohol or on losing weight bemoaned their resumption of their excesses. While the intrinsic comfort provided by food and addictive substances may in itself have been highly motivating, I believe that the predictable sameness experienced in eating and drinking may have provided uncertainty regulating benefits that contributed to overindulgence.

A more drastic and ominous aspect of the search for sameness as a mode of uncertainty regulation involves the denial of difference and/or attempts at its suppression. On the level of the societal suprasystem, think of the “America: Love it or leave it” slogans of the Vietnam era in this regard. Attempts to suppress political dissent at times of great uncertainty are another example. I suspect that some members of minority groups, especially those who bear physical resemblances to those responsible for the attacks, flew flags less out of a sense of patriotism or a wish for unity, than out of fear that if they refused to show that they were like others they would be subjected to enormous



hostility by those who urgently needed to regulate uncertainty in this way.

### THE SEARCH FOR DIFFERENCE

Most psychoanalysts agree that self-experience is greatly affected by the extent to which a person develops a sense of himself or herself as differentiated from others, unique. Today belief in the possibility of achieving independence from others has been replaced, especially among relational theorists, with the conviction that certain developmental processes produce an experience of self-differentiation, or as Stolorow and Atwood describe this, “the evolving sense of being a distinct center of affective experience and personal agency” (79).

We must feel reasonably certain that affirming, validating connections to others are consistently available, or risk the terror of self annihilation, an experience that Atwood, Stolorow, and Orange place at the heart of psychosis. The regulation of uncertainty about obtaining relational experiences that support a sense of differentiated selfhood often takes the form of what I call a search for difference. We tend to regulate uncertainty about maintaining a sense of differentiated selfhood by experiencing ourselves as unlike others and/or not in perfect synchrony with them. The search for difference takes innumerable forms. It often involves comparing, contrasting, and making distinctions. It may come into play when we assert our preferences, tastes, and styles of living that contrast with the preferences, tastes and styles of others. It is undoubtedly an aspect of every conceivable form of creativity. The search for difference is probably related to Lichtenberg’s motivational system involving exploration and assertiveness.

I see another common expression of a search for difference in our tendency to divide reality into dichotomies. When we place any given aspect of reality into one or the other side of a dichotomy, the “either-or” thinking involved is likely to reduce the experience of uncertainty. The wish to limit uncertainty may well play a role in the age-old tendency to split human qualities into dichotomies such as good/evil, healthy/sick, and happy/sad. Once a dichotomy is established, belief in its “naturalness” and “rightness” may assume the quality of blind and passionately

maintained faith. (As I have suggested elsewhere, the experience of faith often serves as a powerful regulator of uncertainty [2000]).

While, as we have seen, flying the flag seems to have been part of a search for sameness, it may have also been part of a search for difference. Indeed, both meanings may have coexisted for many people. That is to say, displaying the flag may also represent an attempt to emphasize one’s difference from those who do not share one’s views. As Vamik Volkan suggests, large groups have their own ritualistic relationships. In international conflict, he notes, what is more important than “the facing of an external enemy,” are shared “internal representations” of the enemy (95). President Bush’s condemnation of the terrorists as evil went a long way toward reinforcing the us/them and good/evil dichotomies that might have been rejected as simplistic at another time. In fact, one feature of the tendency to establish dichotomies in the wake of trauma is the reduction of complexity and the embrace of black and white thinking. I was surprised and relieved to find that only a few patients and acquaintances railed against Muslims or Arabs as whole groups. On the contrary, most people I know expressed concern that such sweeping condemnation would take place.

I found more subtle signs of a search for difference in myself and in others. For example, within hours of learning of the attacks, I felt driven to help. On September 12th, along with a number of colleagues, I joined a Red Cross team that traveled to ground zero, and I later worked on a hotline for families of victims. I am aware that my wish to help was complexly motivated, and in part expressed my compassion for those who had suffered more severely and directly than I. Still, I believe that my need to regulate uncertainty about my own survival and those of my loved ones was involved in the actions I took. By throwing myself full force into my customary helping role, I not only helped restore a familiar sense of myself, thereby reestablishing a strong basis on which my sense of connection to others depends, but I also reaffirmed that I am a helper, not one who needs help. I was different from them.

In a similar vein, a number of my patients shamefully told of feeling nothing, or of feeling reluctant to

open themselves to the horror and pain around them. For some this response had much to do with the numbing so often associated with posttraumatic reactions. Yet, I believe that one woman, a therapist herself, spoke for many others when she spoke of her wish to distance herself from the plight of those who had lost loved ones. To feel distant, for this woman, meant that she was different. Feeling different allowed her some sense of certainty that her loved ones were safe.

### RONALD

Among the first phone calls I received after the towers fell was Ronald's. "Hi Doris, it's me," he said in a low, shaky voice. "I'm okay." Bursting into tears, I told him how worried I'd been and how grateful I was that he had let me know he was safe. Ronald, a single man in his late thirties worked in a law firm whose offices were located on a high floor of the North Tower. Reluctant to hurry indoors on that warm sunny morning, he had planned to go for a run, vote, and show up later than usual for work. He had been heading for a subway to the World Trade Center when he heard the news.

Ronald's thoughtfulness in calling me was hardly unexpected. During our long-standing therapeutic relationship, he had often demonstrated exquisite sensitivity to my feelings. The youngest in a large family, Ronald's mother had turned to him for comfort and support when her husband died, although he was only six at the time. He had subsequently devoted himself to her emotional well-being, often to the detriment of his own need for caretaking and guidance. Dedicating himself to lightening the burdens she carried as a single mother, he rarely expressed any feelings that he feared would unravel her precarious sense of self. On the few occasions when he failed to support her perception that she had singlehandedly produced a perfectly happy and well-functioning family, she would look as if he had struck her and she would turn away from him in stony silence. Fearful of such a response, he had not told her about having been sexually abused by her brother in the year following his father's death until he was urged to do so by a college counselor. He considered that overcoming his dread of hurting her by revealing that he was homosexual was among his most proud achievements in analysis.

It is little wonder that prominent among the expe-

riential certainties that had organized his self-experience (Stolorow and his colleagues speak of "organizing principles" [e.g., Stolorow & Atwood]; Orange uses the term "emotional convictions") was his belief that unless he tended to the needs and feelings of another person he would be perceived as hurtful and he would be abandoned. He had learned to regulate his uncertainty about the fulfillment of his relational needs by disavowing aspects of himself that he felt were antithetical to receiving it, such as his reproachfulness, his neediness, his sexuality, and other qualities he perceived to be offensive to his mother.

After years of cautiously testing my vulnerability to criticism, he had grown increasingly bold in calling my attention to lapses in attuned responsiveness on my part. He would beam as I celebrated his courage in openly revealing his feelings to me. His initially tentative experiments with authentic relating outside of treatment had met with unanticipated but joyful success. Again and again his fear that he would be shunned as hurtful and destructive for voicing some need or criticism proved unfounded. With few exceptions his relationships had deepened and flourished as his need for his extreme regulatory measures lessened. Insofar as I perceived the integration of previously disavowed aspects of himself as indicating his therapeutic progress, my confidence in my self and in our work flourished. Yet, whenever I became even mildly defensive in the face of some criticism or seemed at all injured by it, Ronald quickly back-pedaled. He would apologize profusely and reassure me that he knew I was trying my best. In sessions just before the attack, his efforts to appease me had become increasingly open to exploration. I could hardly have felt more confident that the analysis was unfolding in a richly productive way.

During the first weeks after 9/11, Ronald seemed to show few signs of severe trauma except for a marked blandness in his affective expressiveness. He coolly commented on the devastation around him, the loss of his friends and colleagues, and the destruction of his office. With more emotional intensity, however, he expressed his growing contempt for men who had once been his lovers. In the past, he had been powerfully attracted to men who were dark complexioned and exotic looking. Now he said they "turned him off" and that he no longer had anything in common with them.

By March, around six months after the attacks, I realized that Ronald seemed more depressed. In response to my questions about his mood, he complained that he had gained weight and was drinking more than was customary for him. I reminded Ronald that by gaining weight after his sexual abuse as a child he had attempted to show his mother that something was terribly wrong. “Perhaps,” I suggested, “you are showing me that something is wrong rather than telling me about it.” With his eyes filling with tears, he said, “Of course, something’s terribly wrong, a terrorist attack on New York City is wrong.” Then, to my astonishment, he erupted in rage. “You don’t seem to get it. You’re always talking about ‘the disaster’ or ‘the catastrophe,’ “ he said in a mocking voice, “you make it sound like it was a bad storm that knocked down a couple of buildings rather than evil monsters who coolly designed and carried out a plan to kill thousands of innocent people.”

I wondered if my minimizing language had conveyed to Ronald my wish to deny the horrible destructiveness inflicted by the terrorists, much as his mother had denied the abuse he had experienced as a child. As I began to convey my supposition to Ronald, he stopped me by saying. “What’s wrong with me? I’m jumping down your throat for nothing. You have a right to talk about the attacks however you want to.”

“You must feel very worried about hurting me with your criticism,” I responded. Again Ronald’s eyes filled with tears. Then he buried his face in his hands and sobbed. “Why was I spared when so many good people were killed? I’m so ashamed, so ashamed.” As we explored his self recriminations, it became apparent that it was just these feelings of guilt and shame that Ronald had desperately sought to avert. As he observed, his feelings seemed to him proof that he had something to feel guilty and shameful about. Although he did not say, “like the terrorists,” it was clear to both of us that this was what he meant.

We gradually came to understand that the events of September 11th revived for Ronald the anguish he had experienced following his traumatic sexual experiences in childhood. Instead of feeling supported in his perception of his uncle as a hurtful abuser, he experienced himself as destructively hurtful for wishing to force his mother to recognize the painful truths about

their family. Yet to stay connected to his mother, he needed to present himself as good, caring and devoted, and above all untroubled. When I euphemistically referred to the events of September 11th as a catastrophe, I seemed to Ronald very like his mother. To the extent that I was unable to face the truth of the terrorists’ hateful malevolence, I, too, might experience Ronald as hurtful if he expressed the horror and pain he felt. To regulate his uncertainty about receiving the attuned responsiveness he craved from me, responsiveness that sustained his sense of self, Ronald resorted to the extreme regulatory practices of his childhood. He disavowed all feeling that would possibly lead me to perceive him as hurtful and he sought to emphasize the differences between himself and those responsible for his pain. To the extent that his former lovers were ethnically similar to the terrorists he also wished to feel different from them.

My regulatory efforts were just the opposite of Ronald’s. Where he sought difference, I sought sameness. I hoped to find similarities between me and those allied with terrorist organizations in order to reassure myself that my loved ones and I would be safe. The more like me they seemed, the less likely I felt were the chances of further acts of terror. I have little doubt that Ronald perceived my regulatory attempts as threatening his own. Although he voiced his objection only to the words I chose to describe the events of September 11th, I know that I conveyed my search for sameness in many other ways both verbally and nonverbally. I believe that the understanding that emerged from our attempts to sort through our disparate responses to a shared trauma has helped both of us to make our way through this dark and uncertain time.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Of the myriad ways in which uncertainty was regulated after the horrific events of September 11th, I have highlighted the search for sameness and the search for difference. As my clinical example hopefully indicates, understanding a clash of these regulatory modes helped me to address and work through an intersubjective disjunction between me and a patient who was deeply affected by the terrorist attacks. I hope that a consideration of these modes of uncertainty regulation might also prove helpful in understanding the impact



of terrorism outside of the treatment situation as well. I am in complete agreement with Berman's assertion that social responsibility, in the form of attempts to contribute to the psychoanalytic understanding of crucial political issues, and the responsibility to help a particular individual in psychoanalytic treatment are not mutually exclusive (7).

The close association of terrorism and other forms of political violence with trauma has been noted by many psychoanalytically informed thinkers. Among the many deleterious consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cited by an international group of analysts and therapists are the following: (1) "the cycle of recurring traumatization involving violence, humiliation, retaliation and revenge," and (2) "the protracted exposure to conditions of uncertainty, anxiety, and stress" (Berman 2). Insofar as terrorism appears to emerge in contexts of recurring traumatization and the unbearable experiences of uncertainty this engenders, I believe an examination of the following questions may help to guide social action:

1. To what extent are dissenting voices silenced by a political group as an attempt to achieve experiences of sameness, unity, and certainty?

2. To what extent are individual differences denied and demeaning stereotypes applied to an entire group as part of attempt to achieve experiences of difference, distance, and certainty?

3. To what extent does a search for sameness and a search for difference as modes of uncertainty regulation involve transforming those believed responsible for inflicting trauma into evildoers who must be destroyed?

If considering these questions promotes a deeper understanding of our shared need to come to terms with uncertainty, it is my hope that we may discover new ways to end the cycle of recurring traumatization that spawns terrorism.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Theorists allied to the three schools differ with respect to their understanding of what constitutes a "relational experience." As Aron pointed out, although both espouse a theory of intersubjectivity, Jessica Benjamin emphasizes mutual recognition, whereas Stolorow stresses mutual regulation. For many self psychologists, a selfobject experience is relational insofar as it necessarily involves

an experience of oneself in relation to another person. Neither mutual recognition nor mutual regulation is necessarily involved.

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