

PSYCHODYNAMICS OF GROUP RELATIONSHIPS

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Summary

Pines provides a summary of the main concepts in the group analytic perspective and practice. The *matrix* is the shared common history of the group, the conscious and unconscious repository of all events. Analysis offers this concept to the group from the first moment of interaction. The *occupation* of the group becomes the *translation* of symptoms into communications and the *location* of the group process in the transpersonal matrix.

The therapist (leader, conductor) maintains the boundaries of time, space, and search for meaning. The analytic group is a “culture of embeddedness” and a “culture of enquiry” about nature of self (the occupation, work). In groups where healthy human beings grow, others are caregivers who provide reciprocity, gratification, and the impetus for continuing growth. From attachment and relatedness develop both autonomy and connectedness, the psychological double helix of human life. Reciprocity involves turn taking, implicit fairness, and good-enough exchanges.

The group analytic approach that originated with Foulkes can be compared and contrasted with two perspectives on group process that originated at about the same time. Bion, who was also a psychoanalyst, placed the emphasis on the group rather than the individual. He saw the work of a group as being supported or hindered by three basic emotional states: fight-flight, pairing, and dependency. Lewin, a social psychologist, drawing on Gestalt psychology, formulated individual behavior as a function of both personality and the environment.

1. Introduction

S.H. Foulkes was the founder of the group analytic approach to psychotherapy and the formulator of the basic set of concepts concerning the psychodynamics of group relationships that provide the basis for this method of group psychotherapy. Thus the

next section of this article, on history, provides an introduction to these concepts as they are used in group analytic psychotherapy. This is followed by a section giving more details of the major concepts as they were formulated by Foulkes and by some of the others who contributed to this form of psychotherapy. The fourth section gives an indication of some of the similarities and differences between the approach of Foulkes, who conducted analysis through the group, with a contemporary, Bion, who conducted analysis of the group, with Lewin, a social psychologist, whose field theory of individual and group behavior was also influenced by some of the same perspectives that were current in psychology at that time, and with object relations theory. The summary provides a reminder that the central concepts of the psychodynamic view of group relationships were developed in conjunction with Foulkes' group analytic therapy and also gives brief references to the contrasting views of Bion and Lewin.

2. History

The perspective on the psychodynamics of group relationships was developed as an adjunct to group analytic psychotherapy. Foulkes, in his book *Group Analytic Psychotherapy: Method and Principles*, provides an introduction to the practice of group analytic psychotherapy. In the first sentence of Chapter 1, Foulkes tells us that “group analytic psychotherapy is a method of group psychotherapy initiated by myself from 1940 onwards in private psychiatric practice and out-patient clinics . . . it is *not* a psychoanalysis of individuals in a group. Nor is it the psychological treatment of a group by a psychoanalyst. It is a form of psychotherapy *by* the group, *of* the group, including its conductor . . . The principles . . . can be applied to all forms of human groups.” There are three sections in Foulkes' book: group analytic orientation, the group analytic group, and the conductor. Although the concepts that describe various aspects of the psychodynamics of groups can be used to gain insight concerning interaction in all forms of groups, they are most easily observed in groups for which the main task is some form of therapy or self-analysis.

In group analytic psychotherapy the group's *occupation* is to analyze the verbal communication, considered as group association. The unconscious content is analyzed, not just manifest content. The group analytic process highlights the unconscious processes. Part of the psyche is “repressed unconscious.” This is manifest in symptoms but also in products of the mind in disguised and distorted form, as Freud has described with regard to the interpretation of dreams. The process of deciphering is *translation*, the translation of symptoms into problems that can be consciously understood. Unconscious thoughts become conscious by becoming attached to verbal representations. A second process is *location*, which is the mapping (definition) of processes within the transpersonal matrix that brings the configuration of the matrix to light. In group analysis, three basic concepts concern (1) the relatedness of individuals in the group, (2) the location and configuration of a disturbance, and (3) the nature of communication, both channel and process.

The group analytic situation is like individual therapy, in that patients can voice innermost thoughts. The basic tool is free association. In group, compared with individual, therapy the emphasis is on the “here and now” rather than on genetic development and origins of disturbance. In an analytic group, the members explore the

social unconscious, feelings that reflect influences exerted by other individuals and by the group as a whole.

In the group room there is a small intimate circle of chairs. A small table is placed in the middle. The therapist is part of the circle, a “magic” circle, a distance at which members will interact best. Within the circle there may be several types of communication nets, even if they are not formalized: leader centered, group centered, isolation, sub-group, monopolism, or links in a chain. The optimal size for a group is seven. For a group to be at all representative, five persons are needed, including the therapist.

In group analytic therapy the role of therapists (the *conductors*) is to enhance the conditions where group properties are most likely to be seen. A “climate” or “atmosphere” of easy permissiveness, of free-floating discussion is provided. The climate combines a supportive factor and an analytic factor. Defenses are analyzed, conflicts bared, and insights occur into irrational modes of behavior. In an ordinary group there is little time for this as there is a focus on a task (occupation) that does not involve the analysis of the interaction.

The group analytic approach makes possible *socialization through the group*. Society is less tolerant than a therapeutic group and is more likely to reject isolates than to find ways to incorporate them into the group. In the course of group development, individuals’ references to “I” and “me” become “we” and “us.”

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Biographical Sketch

A. Paul Hare was born in 1923 in the USA. He is a professor of sociology, emeritus, of Ben-Gurion University and a member of the staff of the Social Studies Unit at the J. Blaustein Institute for Desert Research. He has degrees from Swarthmore College (B.A. 1947), Iowa State University (Ames) (B.S. 1948), University of Pennsylvania (M.A. 1949), and University of Chicago (Ph.D. 1951). He has written or edited, alone or with others, 27 books and over 100 articles and chapters in books, most of which describe some aspect of social interaction in groups.