Group Psychotherapy and Group Dynamics

Dr Gillian Rathbone

www.le.ac.uk
Group Exercise

Thoughts and feelings about Psychotherapy in a Group

- as a professional
- as a patient
Group Exercise

- Why do therapy in groups?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages?
Advantages of Group Therapy

• Patients share experiences with others who can relate to them
• They learn to relate to other people and to care about each other/be cared for
• They learn to share
• They see aspects of themselves in other group members
• They get and give feedback to and from each other
• They learn how much they have in common with others (consciously and unconsciously)
Disadvantages of Group Therapy

- Setting up a group takes time to ensure there are sufficient committed people to keep the group going
- If people drop out this can derail the group as it is hard to run a group with a small number of members
- Some people may try to ‘hide’ in the group
- Some people may try to dominate the group
- Care needs to be taken over the mix of patients to avoid excessive conflict or some members being silenced
Therapeutic Factors in Groups - Yalom (eleven primary factors)

- Instillation of hope
- Universality (we are not alone)
- Imparting information
- Altruism (opportunity to benefit others)
- The corrective recapitulation of the primary family group
- Development of socialising techniques
• Imitative behaviour (modelling)
• Interpersonal learning (importance of relationships; corrective emotional experience; group as social microcosm)
• Group cohesiveness
• Catharsis
• Existential factors (meaning of life issues)
Therapeutic Factors - Foulkes (four)

- **Socialisation**

  (‘...the patient [being] brought out of his isolation into a social situation in which he can feel adequate........express himself freely.......show understanding for others...a fellow being on equal terms with others’)

  The patient feels equal because he has equal status with others in relation to the group
• Mirror Reaction

‘The person sees himself, or part of himself - often a repressed part of himself - reflected in the interactions of other group members.......He also gets to know himself......by the effect he has on others and the picture they form of him’

Includes (a) identifying with others’ experiences (resonance) (b) seeing how others see oneself and (c) seeing aspects of one’s self in others

The patient recognises all have similar struggles - ‘all in the same boat’
Exchange

‘...children accept many things from each other which they would oppose if they came from their parents’

being prepared to listen to people in a similar position to oneself
• Activation of the collective unconscious
unconscious material shared by members of the group arising from shared culture, language and pre-history which enables group members to relate to one another at a fundamental level
The group as an arena for the resolution of shame

- Shame is a social (group) phenomenon first introduced by the mother to socialise the child
- Excessive shaming in childhood (as a result of parents who are unavailable, unreliable, excessively strict or abusive) leads to shameproneness which underlies many personality disorders
- If shame can be explored safely in a group, resolution can occur which may be more powerful than in individual therapy
Types of Group Psychotherapy

- Delivery of individual therapies in a group primarily for practical and financial reasons e.g. CBT for Anxiety management, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Self-Harm
- Group Analytic Psychotherapy
- Expressive Psychotherapies eg. Psychodrama, Art Psychotherapy
- Self-help Groups (no therapist/conductor)
Group Psychodynamics - Foulkes

- **Matrix**
  
  ‘the network of all individual mental processes [in a group], the psychological medium in which they meet, communicate and interact’

- **Free-floating Discussion**

- **Resonance**

- **Location of Disturbance** eg. scapegoating
• Group Resistance and Anti-group
• Multiple transferences
• Value of ‘group as a whole’ interpretations
Bion did not explore the therapeutic use of groups but studied group dynamics and described **Basic Assumptions** which interfere with the task of the group

- Dependency
- Fight/flight
- Pairing

Hopper added Massification/Aggregation
Therapeutic Communities

- a participative, group-based approach to long-term mental illness, personality disorders and drug addiction
- usually residential, with the clients and therapists living together
- includes group psychotherapy as well as practical activities
- UK - 'democratic analytic' therapeutic communities for the treatment of moderate to severe personality disorders and complex emotional and interpersonal problems.
- USA - for the treatment of drug and alcohol dependence.
Five Universal Qualities of a Therapeutic Community

- **Attachment**: a culture of belonging
- **Containment**: a culture of safety
- **Communication**: a culture of openness
- **Involvement**: a culture of participation and citizenship
- **Agency**: a culture of empowerment
Rapoport’s Four Principles of a Therapeutic Community

- **Communalism**: living and being together providing group acceptance within family-style environment
- **Democratisation**: each resident and staff member having equal power in decision-making increasing personal authority and participation
- **Permissiveness**: tolerating expression of feeling and behaviours to expose residents
- **Reality confrontation**: continual interpretations of members behaviour and its impact on others.
Transference, Repetition and Re-enactment

- There are multiple transferences and countertransferences in a group.
- In a group there is the potential for reenactment of the ‘total situation’.
- There is the potential for repetition of maladaptive coping mechanisms in the group and understanding of them by the whole group.
Things to think about

- Which came first, the individual or the group?
- In a group, each member has to struggle between his desire to be an individual and his desire to fit in the group.
- A group creates ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’.
- A group provides a microcosm of the power relations in society.
- An analytic group provides a forum for multiple discourses or different ways of looking at things.
Provided by The Leicester Gondar Link Collaborative Teaching Project

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.