

Group Psychotherapy - Concepts and Interpretation Techniques

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ABSTRACT

The concept of group interpretation, arising from the opposition to the concept of individual interpretation, necessarily had in its origin a teleological character. Group would be the interpretation that benefits the group and not any of its components, in which case the interpretation would be individual, although done in a group. It is understood that only in theory are there interpretations that deserve, rigorously, the name of individual interpretations in groups. In fact, for an interpretation to reach only one of the components of a group, it would be essential that there is no intercommunication between the affected patient, the beneficiary, and the other components of the group. It has never been possible to observe groups in which such intercommunication did not exist entirely. It seems to us that it always exists in all groups, even those in which integration is minimal. Good integration, it is time to remember, presupposes intercommunication.

Keywords

Concepts Psychoanalysis, Group Therapy, Interpretation, Psychotherapy.

Introduction

Psychoanalysis and groupanalysis are conceptualized and described as methods of investigation and therapy with common theoretical bases but different operative procedures. This difference is based only on the object of immediate therapeutic relationship. In psychoanalysis, the analyst fosters the relationship with the analysand and his internalized partial objects and objects. In group-analysis the analyst fosters the same relationship with the analysand, but here he also encourages (groupanalytic pattern) the flourishing that springs from the relationship of each analysand with fantasized objects and with real objects, represented in the other analysands. For everyone, and for each one in particular, these fantasized and/or real objects will gradually assume a significance as a psychic representation of past and significant object relations (groupanalytic matrix).

Metapsychological concepts are essentially observed in the individual, although in certain circumstances and in certain phases of the group-analysis their dissemination may be verified throughout the group or in some of its members [1,2]. Recently, psychotherapists who deal with interpretation in group psychotherapy have insisted on the desirability of group interpretations and the inconvenience of individual group interpretations. However, they are incomplete in defining what is and what is not group interpretation. There is, therefore, a lack of studies on the concept of group interpretation and its technique. Its importance, however expensive it may be, will hardly be overestimated, since the whole efficiency of group analytic psychotherapy, as well as of analytic individual psychotherapy, depends, of course, on properly formulated interpretations.

Based on the results of the re-examination of observations that we have had the opportunity to make in recent years, there have been frequent innovations in the technique of interpretation, rehearsed with the purpose of verifying the extent to which the

interpretations were related to each or all of the components of the psychotherapeutic group [3-6]. The concept of group interpretation, arising from the opposition to the concept of individual interpretation, necessarily had in its origin a teleological character. Group would be the interpretation that benefits the group and not any of its components, in which case the interpretation would be individual, although done in a group.

It is understood that only in theory are there interpretations that deserve, rigorously, the name of individual interpretations in groups. In fact, for an interpretation to reach only one of the components of a group, it would be essential that there is no intercommunication between the affected patient, the beneficiary, and the other components of the group. It has never been possible to observe groups in which such intercommunication did not exist entirely. It seems to us that it always exists in all groups, even those in which integration is minimal. Good integration, it is time to remember, presupposes intercommunication.

It should be concluded, therefore, that, to a certain extent, group interpretation is any and all interpretations made in a group, even when it only clearly refers to one of its members, since, if directed to a single patient, it will certainly reach others who are in intercommunication. By taking advantage of one directly, the others will indirectly take advantage of it. However, although interpretations clearly addressed to only one of the members of a group are, strictly speaking, group interpretations, are there not other interpretations to which the group qualifier is better applied? We understand that.

In order to clarify the conceptualization of interpretations, in particular what would more appropriately be called group interpretations, we turn our attention to unquestionably individual interpretations, such as those made in individual analytic psychotherapy. Sometimes, it happens that, when interpreting, the analyst only uses a few data collected by him from the much he has heard from the patient or observed in him. In order to better characterize this interpretation, we will call it partial, since it uses a small part of the elements provided to the therapist. Other times, it happens that the therapist reaches an understanding that encompasses much of what he has been able to hear and observe and, based on this broad understanding, formulates an interpretation that involves a lot - and not a little - of the material at his disposal. In order to better establish what characterizes this interpretation, we will call it the global interpretation.

Comparing individual analytic psychotherapy with group psychotherapy inspired by psychoanalysis, it will be noticed that the interpretations, little called partial interpretation and global interpretation and practiced in individual analytic psychotherapy, have equivalents in group analytic psychotherapy. In this case, when interpreting, the therapist can make use of elements provided by a single patient or even parts of these elements, ignoring everything else that has been possible to hear from him or her and from the other patients. This interpretation deserves to be described as partial because it is limited to a small part of the material

presented to the therapist. Also similar to what occurs in individual psychotherapy, the therapist, in group psychotherapy, can achieve understanding based on many of the elements provided not by one, but by two or more patients; consequently, it may formulate an interpretation covering statements by several members of the group. These interpretations would correspond to those that we have just examined, when we have examined two possible modalities of interpretation in individual analytic psychotherapy, called global interpretation.

We understand that the title group interpretation fits more appropriately than the other interpretations, and it is on this that the understanding of manifestations of two or more patients of a group is based. Logically, according to this criterion, an interpretation would be all the more worthy of the qualifier of group the greater the number of patients in a group whose manifestations it covered.

Let us examine the concept that has just been formulated, to see if it harmonizes with what is originally considered to be a group interpretation. The concept of group interpretation originated from the confrontation between individual interpretations, well known in individual analytic psychotherapy, and those interpretations made in group therapy and which deserve special designation because they affect not a single patient, but, at the same time, a group of patients. To the latter, let us continue to recall, the name of group interpretation came to be applied. The characteristic stamp of group interpretation, when confronted with individual interpretations, would therefore be in its power to reach more than one patient, that is, a group of patients.

This power to reach more than one patient is favored, in the interpretations we consider to be the ones that do the most justice to the name of group interpretations, by the explicit, verbalized use of material provided by several members of a group. The concept defended by us is thus in tune with the origins of the use of the expression group interpretation.

The enunciation of group interpretations, which we have just conceptualized, is not always done in a single step. The various stages of a group interpretation appear *prima facie* to be individual interpretations. However, as they succeed each other, they reveal themselves as parts of a group interpretation that will gradually take shape.

In group analytic psychotherapy, nothing prevents and everything recommends that the technique of interpretation be the same as that of individual analytic psychotherapy. The difficulties in applying the psychoanalytic technique to analytic group psychotherapy are more apparent than real. Everything is easier as long as the therapist considers the successive manifestations of several patients in a group in a similar way to what the psychoanalyst considers the successive manifestations of a single patient in individual analytic psychotherapy. Just as the psychoanalyst, if he follows the norms of interpretation defended by Strachey, takes into account, when beginning an interpretation, the most urgent anxiety of his single patient, in group psychotherapy, when beginning an interpretation,

the therapist will take into account the most urgent of the anxieties manifested either by one or several patients who are members of the group - and so on. In the analysis of the defenses and in the presentation of the latent content of the symptoms [7].

The adoption of the psychoanalytic technique in group interpretation offers fewer difficulties when group cohesion is great. In this case, the group of patients behaves as if it were a single patient, an individual. It should be noted, moreover, that the individual is a group of vital needs, of instinctive impulses, and, from this angle of observation, resembles a group of patients.

The adoption of the psychoanalytic technique in group interpretations is more difficult when the group is divided or fragmented. Similarly, in psychoanalysis interpretations are in principle more difficult when there is psychic disintegration in the patient.

If there is unanimity among the members of a group, if they are all of one opinion on the problem with which they are concerned, if what one expresses is the expression of the thoughts of the others, then the interpretation of the material supplied by any of the members of the group is also an interpretation of the psychic state of the others at that moment. When there is no unanimity, when the group is divided into two or more parties that disagree on the question under consideration, what all the members of the group have in common is that they are diverging. The interpretation that deals with this divergence, this conflict of opinion, will be group and may, without greater difficulty, follow a technique similar to that employed by psychoanalysis in the interpretation of internal conflicts of individuals. For the sake of reasoning, let us consider an idealized group, in which all the members faithfully perceive reality and therefore do not differ from each other in the appreciation

of the facts. The manifestations of any of its members would express what any of the others would manifest. Consequently, the manifestations of any one would be manifestations of all; they would be, ultimately, manifestations of the group. In this idealized group, the therapist would have nothing to do, because all its members see reality faithfully, which constitutes the final goal of the treatment.

Acknowledgments

In memoriam: Luiz Miller de Paiva.

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