

Psychotherapy Guidebook

JUNGIAN GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY

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Jungian Group Psychotherapy

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DEFINITION

Jungian Group Psychotherapy is designed to provide individuals with both interpersonal and intrapersonal experience of the psyche within a group setting. In Jungian theory and practice, the priority of individual analytic therapy, one to one, is explicitly affirmed. Group therapy, therefore, is seen as a valuable adjunct and aid to the central work of an individual with an analyst. The group by its very nature constellates unconscious projections, affective (emotional) reactions, and the struggle for individuality in relation to the collective. The concreteness and immediate experience of group interaction provide an arena within which individuals can encounter their psychological reality. Unconscious dynamics are first confronted, often painfully, and then slowly assimilated through the mirroring effect of group feedback and group acceptance. In this way the introverted and individual bias in Jungian psychology is compensated by the healing potential of creative communal experience.

HISTORY

Carl Jung himself was profoundly skeptical about the value of group therapy and he never included it in his own analytical practice. His concern and appreciation for the value and uniqueness of the intrapsychic experience of the individual made him wary of the intrusiveness and collective categorizing so typical of much group behavior. It was not until the early 1960s, around the time of Jung's death, that a very few Jungian analysts began to experiment with group process as an adjunct to individual analysis. Group therapy as a treatment modality has become increasingly accepted by Jungians, but even now is practiced only by a minority. Only in the New York Training Center is group therapy included as a required element in the training experience of prospective analysts.

TECHNIQUE

Group psychotherapy is such a recent development for Jungians that no commonly recognized or agreed upon technique has as yet developed. At this point the particular personality and past group experience of the therapist is liable to determine his technique more than any other factor. There is as yet only the barest minimum of Jungian writing specifically devoted to the subject (see bibliography). One implication of this lack of a substantial history or literature is that Jungians have had to look outside their own school to find models and methods with which to work.

Probably the most important contributions to the techniques used by Jungian therapists in group process have been drawn from the gestalt and encounter group experience. Some therapists also use bio-energetic and sensory awareness methods. In almost every case the method chosen has the purpose of aiding an individual to explore the intrapsychic dimensions of some interpersonal conflict. Two methods used extensively in individual Jungian analysis — namely, dream analysis and creative fantasy — are also frequently employed within the group process. When, for example, a member has had a dream about the group, such a piece of unconscious material is considered most appropriate for group analysis, even though it may also be worked within an individual session. Creative fantasy involves a method of guided exploration and analysis of images emerging spontaneously from the psyche of an individual group member or occasionally from the unconscious material of several group members at the same time. The starting point for such a fantasy may be a dream image, a powerful affective reaction, a significant figure in the group member's life, or possibly an internal image evoked by some other member of the group.

Since Jungians consider the experience of individual analysis to be the result of a unique encounter between two psyches, there is naturally a rather similar attitude toward the role and function of the therapist in a group. Various projections and transference phenomena will inevitably occur that the therapist must deal with in a manner consonant with his own personality

and style. The focus of therapeutic leadership in a group is almost never a concentration upon transference and resistance as the primary catalyst for awareness. The therapist is more often one who intervenes only when other resources in the group are not available or when specific professional knowledge and interpretation is needed. Such an approach tends to evoke a transference to the group itself in both positive and negative forms, as nourisher and devourer, as rule giver and liberator.

APPLICATIONS

Although there is no consistent and widely accepted technique, Jungian group therapists are in general agreement as to the central values and applications of the group process. Absolute priority is given to the legitimacy and integrity of the experience of the individual within the group. Whatever the projections, reactions, distortions of a group member, these are approached with a phenomenological and accepting attitude as that individual's present psychological reality. Positive and negative interactions in the group are first allowed to be played out and fully experienced and then are looked at in terms of subjective meaning and unconscious dynamics. Such an approach provides each group member with a greatly strengthened sense of individual identity and value in the face of social collectivity. Particularly for introverted and socially isolated people, such an experience of individuality within a group can lead to significant therapeutic change in

social adaptation. By its very nature a group presents each member with a variety of personalities and psychological types in a way that no one-to-one individual analytic experience can do. Thinking and feeling, sensation and intuition, introversion and extraversion are all present and evoke reactions within the group. In that way the group process becomes a laboratory for the life situation and conflicts of its members in their marriages, work, and other interpersonal involvements. The major complexes, such as mother, father, oedipal, authority, etc., are spontaneously enacted within the group and thereby become available to analytic exploration and individual assimilation.