

"Freud's Theory of Group Dynamics"

Malcolm Pines

- * Freud made a token gesture towards group therapy although he had no faith in it.
- * His interest in this direction is best described by his use of the term 'masspsychologie' - about crowds and masses rather than groups and about 'man and society' rather than group psychology.

There is a drive towards the truth. The mind thrives on this and atrophies on lies. Ethologists say that this is fact.

Therapy is an act of faith (trust?) - open your mouth!

History of Freud's Theory of Group Dynamics

1. 19th Century

Following the French revolution, there was a huge interest in France in crowds, citizens, armies, mobs etc. For instance Haussman redesigned Paris with wide boulevards etc. with a view to dealing with the perceived threat of mob power.

2. 1898

Freud summarised the aetiology of the neuroses thus:

- * repression of sexuality in the individual (mirrored by)..... suppression of sexuality in society.
- * Society represses people's instincts and this, by a process which is physiological/biological, leads to neuroses.
- * That is to say , society believed in sexual hygiene. Ergo, coitus interruptus led to neuroses.

His topographical model of the mind at this time reflected this view:

repressing society

CONSCIOUS

UNCONSCIOUS

sexual drive

Foulkes said that "symptoms have no exchange value. They have to be turned into words which, like money, do have an exchange value."

3. 1903

- * Neurosis is a private religion.
- * Religion civilises, but in a conforming and repressive way.

4. 1910

- * Freud went to the USA with Ferenczi and Jung to give the Clark Lectures.
- * He now felt that society would find a way of sublimating inhibiting sexual drives and thus moved from the topographical to the structural model of the mind.
- * So society was now thought to allow expression of drives, but in sublimated ways. Society/culture were not in opposition to drives but were working more in tandem with them.

This was a more complicated view i.e. from repression to sublimation. So, suppression was necessary for civilisation and culture.

While in the USA, Freud met Trigant Burrow to whom he was respectful in person but about whom he talked less respectfully when speaking with others. Freud had little time for Burrow's interest in and theories on, groups, and Burrow eventually had to give up his Presidency of The American Psychoanalytical Society.

5. 1913

Freud expressed his developing views in his book 'Totem and taboo'.

* He was now interested in a type of anthropological view of, "the mind of a savage."

'Savages' and children were seen to be similar thus:

Magical thinking.		Primary
Impulsivity.	}	Process
Inability to delay.		Thinking.

* Civilisation was now seen to be the result of the renunciation of pleasure (the immediate) and the taming of instincts.

* Freud developed an interest in 'The primal horde.'

At an individual level, Freud was the leader of a band of brothers who wanted to overthrow society. The brothers slew him and elected Adler, one of their own, to replace him. They were then filled with remorse and slew him in turn and this process is constantly repeated in society. Freud identified with the rebel/child but also with the father/authority.

Entering a group is a commitment to respond. It is therefore legitimate for the conductor to say, "what were you thinking when he said that..." and thus to speed things up.

6. 1920

Freud explored issues such as:

Repetition compulsion - forces driving people
down and back.

Death instinct (Thanatos) V life instinct (Eros)

All his thoughts about society now involved these
omnipresent, environmental forces.

7. 1921

Group Psychology

Freud was aware of the masses which had been mobilised for
The Great War.

He began to think in terms of Eros rather than libido - an
erotic force, binding people together. He thought in terms
too, of not just sex but of aggression. That is of ideas
of Thanatos and Eros.

He decided that groups were held together by more than a
herd instinct but by a libidinal drive involving a common
relation to the leader. (A projected part of the self on
to the leader.)

Freud was now saying that you can't think of an individual
without thinking of the other as:

object

opponent

model

helper etc.

So, individual and group psychology were linked.

Foulkes - Neurosis occurs when a person is no longer a nodal but a focal part of the network.

Freud - also says that neurosis is autistic - the person withdraws from a group role to a private/autistic role.

In groups (masses!) people lose primary thinking and reduce to savage/infantile thinking.

Crowds are "conservative", even when they seem radical although their level of functioning can actually increase, e.g. become more altruistic.

Le Bon - Wrote an influential book called "The Crowd". He was an adventurer and proto-fascist who preached that order was needed in order to restrain crowds.

In a crowd, the individual, civilised diversity is diminished and communality increases.

"The Crowd" was read at St Cyr, by De Gaulle, Teddy Roosevelt and by Freud.

In therapy groups you need diversity in order to find

communality. The more that a group is homogenised, the more that it is led by its instinctual drives.

In a crowd too there is diffusion of ego boundaries and waves of emotion pass round quickly. This relinquishment of individuality has a similarity to hypnosis (in which Freud was of course interested) in which the hypnotist stands for the parental figure and people abandon themselves to the other/parent.

Schopenhaur was interested in what he called 'the cold porcupine process'. People try to get close/warm but then spike each other. The trick is, to find the correct emotional distance from one another.

In groups there is an identifiable paradox. There is always aggression/hostility which manifests as a drive for superiority. This is based on regressive phenomena such as greed or selfishness. This aggression is always directed outwards and thus prevents 'merger'. However, in a group too, people can lose their aggression toward one another and tend to 'merge'. This is the result of progressive forces based on libidinal energies which lead toward love of the other.

McDougal - looked at organised groups not disorganised groups as Freud had.

Freud (1922) - also then looked at organised groups, specifically

the Church and the Army both of which have leaders toward whom members have a shared relationship.

8. 1923

Freud elaborated his structural theory about the model of the mind - Superego. }

Ego. }

Id. }

9. 1930

"Civilisation and its discontents."

10. 1938

"Moses and Monotheism."

How does this relate to group therapy?

Fritz Redl looked at the different types of leadership within teaching.

i) Patriarchal - children treated and behave, not as individuals but do want to get the leader's love.

ii) Libidinal (younger/sexy) - children are excited etc.

iii) Tyrannical - children sullen, frightened, look for scapegoats etc.

.....and so on (10 types of teacher).

He therefore did use Freud's idea of the importance of the central person (leader) around whom the group forms but otherwise Freud's ideas had a fairly limited impact on group therapy.

However there was a general position whereby the two contrasting processes were seen to be associated with 'masses'.

Regressive tendencies - crowds/masses - uniform, moving away from the highest common factor to the lowest common denominator. This is depicted in popular culture when one man stands out against this trend e.g. '12 Angry Men', 'On the Waterfront', 'High Noon' etc.

Progressive tendencies - in which there is a blurring of boundaries due to libidinal forces.

(ref)

Saravay - spoke of a selective regression in groups to a pre-oedipal level in which the boundary between the self and the other disappears.

In the early part of the group this process is frustrated by the group therapist (can't internalise him) and the group members regress to merging as

boundaries blur. Members do not feel safe in this situation and anxiety increases. The prototype of this situation is the early relationship with the mother where there are no boundaries but instead a merger with the mother.

Thanatos - entropy, "the organic to the inorganic." The organisation fights to survive but eventually will lose the fight to the cold and death. (Even the world will etc.)

Superego - results as the resolution of the Oedipus complex.
- the boy identifies with the father, represses rivalry and thereby introjects society and the rules of society - things you have to obey. This alienates us from ourselves - we are self critical.

- the superego is concerned with self evaluation and self criticism.

- there is a wish to be loved by the superego.

- the superego is a critical, harsh observer of the self and this means that it is hard to escape from depression, guilt etc.

- when the ego and superego merge this leads to a

manic state (elated, non-self critical), in which the power of the superego is now with us, not attacking us.

So - why are destructive forces so powerful?

To 'become more civilised' we suppress aggression, often by means involving sublimation. The more tamed that we are by repression, the more power the superego has and in sublimation we increase the power of Thanatos and decrease the power of Eros.

Man is a social, "political animal" - looking for bonds with others.

Freud/pessimist

Man is in eternal conflict with other men and is only restrained by civilisation (sublimation). Paradoxically this leads to an increase in the force of the superego/Thanatos and this explodes into violence and war.

Foulkes/optimist

He felt so strongly that man is a social animal that needs to make bonds with others.

He thought that the destructive forces in people were sublimated in the group to attack each other's resistances, character

structures etc.

This more optimistic view has been endorsed by many recent writers in works such as:

"The Selfish Gene"	Dawkins
"The Origin of Virtue"	Ridley
"Good Natured"	F. de Waal

Generally, these emphasise that the survival of the group is more important than the survival of the individual. So, caring for others, altruism, reciprocity etc. are necessary for the survival of the 'genes' - this is a biological necessity.

Foulkes - The individual emerges from society and the primary sociality of man.