

A TECHNIQUE IN GROUP PSYCHOTHERAPY

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The following is an initial report of a technique used by the writer in a group-therapy situation for over a year. The group consisted of adults, both men and women, who met weekly for sessions lasting an hour and a half. New members were generally admitted only at the first meeting of each month. Attendance varied from between ten to twenty at any one session. The group was disposed in a circle in which the writer shared a place.

Members were selected according to the following criteria: (1) previous or current participation in private therapy; each member was thus oriented in the same approach to the understanding of the individual in a social context. Furthermore, the writer had the opportunity to become familiar with the life-style of each member before his admission to the group; (2) responsiveness to the group situation. This was a clinical evaluation which excluded patients with severe disturbances who might make group-rapport difficult to achieve or maintain.

The main goal was to create a laboratory-situation in which each member could examine the general premises of social interest and make specific experiments involving his participation with others. Subserving this goal were other objectives: (1) to provide group authority for concepts that each member might not accept readily on the authority of the therapist; to avoid the need of resorting to individual authority; (2) to provide data on the social behavior of each member which could later be examined and discussed with him in private interview; (3) to provide general group experience; some members were otherwise rather isolated socially, others had characteristic difficulties in group situations.

The technique employed involved a direct approach to the problem of the individual within the group. Each member was in turn invited to state how he felt at the time of his entrance into the group. Only a few hesitated at first but at a later meeting they participated. In no case was anyone forced to discuss this matter. New members were informed that this was an initiation procedure and generally complied willingly. An attempt was made in the case of new members to have this discussion take place as soon as possible following introduction to the group.

Following the statement of the individual's initial attitude toward the group, there was a discussion of the function of this attitude. This involved a broad general interpretation of the life-style of the individual in which an attempt was made to correlate his earliest attitudes toward childhood relationships with his adult attitudes as demonstrated in his approach to this group. The analysis of the life-style was made with

data offered by the individual concerning his family constellation and early recollections. The group was encouraged to participate freely in this discussion.

The general response of the group to this project was good - interest in this procedure was consistent. The response of those being "initiated" varied from satisfaction to mild distress which usually abated by the end of the discussion. In no case known to the writer did this discussion cause a withdrawal from the group.

The attitude of the individuals toward the group had a similarly wide range. The most common was that expressed as timidity based on a feeling of inferiority either social or intellectual. Less frequent were expressions of an attitude of superiority toward the group. A related point of interest is the fact that in some cases the timidity was heightened during the brief period of casual social contact prior to the beginning of the meeting whereas in others it was intensified during the meeting itself.

One fact that was repeatedly demonstrated to the group was the extent to which we are all accustomed to interpret the personality of another in terms of overt behavior and in so doing make many mistakes. The typical error was to mistake timidity for an aloof superiority. Recognition of this error was frequent and dramatic.

The advantages of this method are several. First, it helps the individual to remove barriers to integration with the group since the basic obstacle, a feeling of not belonging due to an assumed inferiority, is dealt with openly and directly. Second, the group has an opportunity quickly to find that the individual is not a stranger but strongly resembles itself in the inferiority-feeling, and may therefore be welcomed as belonging. Third, each gains confidence in looking beyond the sometimes formidable "front" erected by others to find something of value.

The initiation of each new member occupied only a part of each session. The balance of the time was spent in discussing topics involving social participation. In each discussion an attempt was made to correlate the opinion of each member with his life-style.

One might anticipate several difficulties in using this method with groups selected otherwise than in accordance with the criteria stated above. However, with the controlled situation which obtained here, these difficulties resolved themselves into three categories: (1) that members of the group might discourage each other with interpretations reflecting errors in their own life-styles; this demands only ordinary alertness in the leadership of the discussion; (2) that completely private matters might enter discussion; the experience of the writer has been that the objectives stated at the beginning of this paper are well-satisfied without the inclusion of such matters; (3) the life-style of the leader may intrude upon or even disturb discussion; an attempt was made to offset this influence by the presentation of his life-style.