

Psychotherapy Guidebook



EXISTENTIAL
GROUP

PSYCHOTHERAPY



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Existential Group Psychotherapy:

The Meta-group

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e-Book 2016 International Psychotherapy Institute

From *The Psychotherapy Guidebook* edited by Richie Herink and Paul R. Herink

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Table of Contents

[DEFINITION](#)

[HISTORY](#)

[TECHNIQUE](#)

[APPLICATIONS](#)

Existential Group Psychotherapy: The Meta-group

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DEFINITION

The Meta-group is a spiritually oriented (value-centered) form of existential group therapy that is radically different from the usual modes of most group therapies. It is not personal, interpersonal, psychoanalytic, or psychodynamic, and avoids group dynamics, interaction, and encounter, thus eliminating competition among members. It is nonpersonal, encouraging joint participation in a harmonious, hermeneutic process of discovering, clarifying, and elucidating the truth as it sheds light on the basic issues of existence.

A spiritual perspective is a center of consciousness from which one sees purely without subjective or objective considerations. An individual's mode of being in the world is determined by his perspective or belief systems. As spiritual beings we participate in absolute reality, which can be realized only in consciousness. Consciousness is the agency by which God (absolute reality) becomes known to man.

The concern of the Meta-group is with the quality and content of

consciousness. Every group session is a vehicle, enabling members to focus on learning to see reality ever more clearly as a context within which life becomes meaningful, intelligent, spontaneous, and harmonious.

HISTORY

In a general sense, Meta-groups have existed whenever people have gathered to explore and understand some task, project, or issue, grounded in a spirit of love and mutual respect. Wherever people participate together in a spirit that transcends them individually, such a group becomes a Meta-group, a manifestation of that higher spirit. An example would be a symphony orchestra or a string quartet gathering to play Mozart. In a more specific therapeutic sense, the Meta-group is a phenomenon arising from Metapsychiatry.^{1*} Metapsychiatry is a dimension of existential analysis that is the healing application in the realm of the psyche of theistic existentialism, which presupposes the existence of God as the center of reality, and man as a spiritual consciousness. Its philosophical background is the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger. By contrast, most existential analysis leans toward the atheistic existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre. Metapsychiatry developed out of the practice of existential analysis of Thomas Hora, M.D., a New York psychiatrist, and is taught through the New York Institute of Metapsychiatry.

TECHNIQUE

The presence of God (reality as ultimately good) is the core of the Meta-group process. The process is a practical exploration of “the good that already is” and clarifies the meaning of the obstacles or errors in perception that prevent people from seeing that good. Existentially valid spiritual principles are the guidelines of the Meta-group and are of key importance in distinguishing the truth from erroneous thinking.

The Meta-group becomes a workshop where problems or questions related to life situations are presented and examined within the context of a higher vision of absolute truth — absolute reality — absolute love, the cornerstone of existence. Each issue raised affords the opportunity to focus on the path to the realization of that absolute reality through the maze of infinite possibilities along the path.

Although life may take many forms, there is only one authentic direction in life’s journey toward the truth. In this light, spiritual principles guide the members to a perspective designed to heal and bring them into conscious alignment with the harmonizing principle of the Universe (God).

A Meta-group leader clearly needs to be a facilitator, inspired by these principles. The quality of his or her presence will be reflected in the quality of the group process. The leader helps to channel the members’ thinking about

the issues raised, in an existentially valid direction. The first step is understanding the meaning of any experience or phenomenon. All experiences and phenomena are “what seems to be,” and reflect the thinking of the experiencer: “We think in secret, and it comes to pass/The world is but our lookingglass” (Anon.). The second step is transcending appearances (“what seems to be”) and elucidating the truth of what really is, represented by the basic existentially valid spiritual principles. Entering a higher authentic level of perception enables group members (often suddenly) to see their everyday problems and errors in living in a radically new light. Thus, the Meta-group is punctuated repeatedly by outbursts of spontaneous laughter. The sharing in this communal vision creates a loving fellowship. The quality of the members’ participation is a reflection of their interest and commitment to the process of learning, which is limited only by false ideas or errors in perception. In a loving context, no one is blamed for or identified with any expressed ignorance and is repeatedly invited to participate harmoniously and authentically in the group task. As each individual member is unconfirmed at an inauthentic level, enormous healing takes place.

Each meeting is a preview of the Kingdom of Heaven (a metaphor for harmonious existence centered on the good of God, revealed in the attributes of love and intelligence). The ability to see clearly is cultivated from week to week and transforms the quality of an individual’s mode-of-being in the world.

APPLICATIONS

The Meta-group is a viable and workable process wherever and whenever individuals seek to grow in the light of inspired truth. A typical example of the application of the Meta-group process is as follows:

A man in the group began the session with the statement of a problem he faced. "When I relate to someone I admire and by whom I want to be well thought of, it seems that I fall all over myself and act foolishly. I want to be respectful and appreciative, but give the opposite impression, and seem insulting and unfriendly. How can I understand this better?"

The leader then asked the group about the best way to approach the problem, and it was correctly suggested that the meaning of what seemed to be would have to be explored. (The meaning of any phenomenon is its mental equivalent, i.e., the idea or ideas of the individual reflected in the phenomenon.) From this beginning, the group members identified the following ideas in the mind of the presenter: 1) a desire to impress and 2) a "wanting." Wanting was identified as personal desire. The leader concurred and asked the group what the difficulty was in intending or wanting to be respectful, since it seemed innocent and innocuous enough. Exploration of the theme of personal desire led to the insight that such intention implied a personal mind, i.e., a mind of one's own. This is clearly a false assumption in the light of the Metapsychiatric understanding that there is only one mind, the

divine love-intelligence that is called God. It was seen that since there is only one mind, there can be only one intention, one will. When an individual realizes that there is only one reality, one will, he will seek to come into harmony with that one will, and thus become a vehicle for love-intelligence to work through. In such a condition, willing only that the will of God be manifest in every situation, the quality of one's responsiveness is loving, intelligent, and spontaneous — harmoniously in accord with the only will that is free. It became clear to the member who raised the question that by personally willing to be “respectful,” he lost his connection with the will of God, and was in fact being calculative and manipulative. Calculative thinking is obviously destructive to the spontaneity that comes from being joyously in harmony with the truth. Therefore the man saw his difficulty as that of calculating how to accomplish his personal will, rather than trusting the truth to make him free.

At this point another insight occurred in the group. A woman thought of her difficulty with her two young children who were “unmanageable.” It occurred to her that she began virtually everything she said to them with “I want.” “I want you to eat your cereal,” “I want you to go to bed now.” “I want some peace and quiet.” It became clear that the children copied their mother and responded to her “I want” with a rebellious “I don't want what you want, and I want what you don't want.” The mother's assertion of personal will was leading to a continual power struggle with the children. She began to see the

necessity of seeking first “the kingdom of God,” i.e., a mind centered on love-intelligence, which would become a harmonizing principle in the household. Indeed, at a later session the woman reported that there had been much improvement as she sought to do the will of God rather than her own.