

When it is difficult to be in the group

Unconscious group processes, family complexes and unreleased potential
in a therapeutic study group.



February 2016

Lilla Monrad

Jungian Analyst IAAP

Abstract

Throughout our life we are in different groups. In most cases the family is our first experience of being in a group. Childhood experiences in the family affect our way of being in groups later in life. The concept of a family complex is introduced. This paper considers the problems and the pain that some members of a therapeutic study group experience when group processes are unconscious. Some group members seem to repeat old patterns originating from their childhood family in new group constellations. The painful perceptions and experiences are illuminated through a small case study that focuses on the pain. These experiences range from scapegoating, anti-group behaviour to re-traumatization. In the search for a deeper understanding of the phenomena, some theories from the field of group analysis, Jung and post-Jungian theory are developed, and an attempt is made to point at initiatives which the individual, the group and the educational institution can take to ease the pain and make it easier for group members to contain differences between themselves and other group members and bear tensions in a group and hopefully transform the pain to a new attitude and a new understanding.

Keywords: Family complex, group life, unconscious group processes

Introduction

In many countries teaching throughout the education system involves work in small groups. In Danish therapeutic education, the students are in groups most of the time. Teacher-led lectures are rare.

Some group members seem unable to thrive and develop their potential in study groups where little attention is given to the group processes. They seem to remain embedded in old roles and patterns deriving from past experiences. The consequence is a lack of growth and many painful experiences.

My theory is that these old roles and patterns go back to the primary family. To investigate this further, I have undertaken a pilot project, which I will describe in the following.

I have defined the concept of a family complex and considered different approaches to group processes in the literature.

I am considering undertaking a research project where all views are represented and the relationship between the individual's family complex and roles and ways of being in a group is examined. This is a future task.

In my search for theories to describe the phenomena, it has become clear that the area I want to focus on lies in the shadowy place between the individual and the collective/archetypal psychology. Singer and Kimbles describe the situation quite precisely:

“... For these very good reasons, collective life more often than not has fallen into the Jungian shadow – so much that it is easy to feel within the Jungian tradition as if the life of the group and the individuals' participation in it exists in no man's land, suspended in the ether somewhere between the much more important and meaningful individual and/or archetypal realms. This tendency for collective life to fall into the Jungian shadow has done great disservice to the tradition of analytical psychology and its potential to contribute to a better understanding of group forces in the psyche.” (Singer and Kimbles, 2004, p. 4)

A human being is primarily a social being living in relations to others. Bion formulates it like this:

“... no individual, however isolated in time and space, can be regarded as outside a group or lacking in active manifestations of group psychology... (Bion, 1968)

I want to discuss the concept of the group on the basis of a case story and suggest some ways to make group life easier.

The Family Complex

When I use the term “family complex”, I understand a complex the individual person has developed due to the role he/she had in relation to primarily parents and siblings but also grandparents, aunts and uncles and the emotional patterns that were created in their interactions. The individual family complex is formed around an archetypal core, the family archetype, through personal experiences with relations and roles in the family.

Andrew Samuels says (Samuels, 2001 p. 46):

“... everyone living in a given culture has a family inside his or her head... The internal family derives from one’s own family as well as from images of ‘family’ which one has internalized.”

Steen Visholm relates this internal family to group life and describes how the complex works in the individual when being in a group:

“The family is not just any special group. It acts as what you could call a ‘*supplier of unconscious group dynamics*’ to other groups. The family is the first group or organization we become acquainted with and have experiences in. ... We are prone to experience other groups and the persons in them based on past experiences.” (Visholm, 2010 p. 271)¹

The family complex involves an ability to be in relationship with more than one person at a time and the roles that are taken on in groups. Does someone feel excluded? Do they exclude others? Do they connect with one person in the group in order to feel safe? All these things derive from experiences with entering the triadic (Oedipal) level. Does someone take on a certain role to feel part of the group? The latter can be a part of an unconscious survival strategy.

My basic assumption is that our family complex is activated every time we enter a group later in life.

The case study

The case consists of interviews with four people undertaking the same therapeutic education². They spend three years in the same group.

In this education people worked with personal stuff in a process you could call learning by doing, i.e. the students tried all the different therapeutic methods on themselves and shared their work with the group in a conversation with the group leader. Some teaching in theory was made, primarily as an introduction to

¹ My translation from Danish to English

² To be admitted to the education, the applicant must be 25 years old, have at least three years of work experience, have a long or medium long higher education and have some insight in psychotherapeutic processes

personal work and woven in the sharing of personal work. Therapy-training and supervision was given on the third year parallel to personal processes.

The size of the group was 21 persons. The education was carried out as residential seminars. People stayed in shared rooms. All group members had to participate in practical tasks in relation to meals, and cleaning before departure.

Themes could be: Introduction to Jung's model of the psyche, Inner Child, Family Story, Madness, The feminine, The Father etc. The group had a new teacher at nearly every course. This left the group very much on its own.

Morning meditation and small dream groups were integrated parts of the daily program. Thus group work was done, but at an unconscious level.

Group dynamics were not a formal part of the program and there was no space for thinking about them or about the role of individuals in the group.

If conflicts arose between two persons they were treated as a specific problem between the two and not as something that arose from the way the whole group was functioning.

Interview

I interviewed four people. Two of the interviewed persons were chosen because I knew they had felt uncomfortable in the group, the other two seemed cautious/closed to me and had not shown their feelings very much.

Each interview lasted a little less than half an hour. Afterwards I made a transcript of the interview and send it by mail to the interviewed persons.

In the interviews I asked about:

- Family background and personal experience of role in family
- Personal experience of one's own role in the study group
- Experience of possibilities to unfold personal potentials in the group
- Suggestions to overcome the difficulties being in the group

In making the interview guide I used the principles for the qualitative research interview described by Steinar Kvale (1996).

I chose to interview two persons who I knew did not feel comfortable in the group and two persons who kept to themselves, because I wanted to examine the relationship between the family complex and functioning in the group. My hypothesis is that the group can reactivate early and enduring family complex.

I intend to make a research project where I investigate the relationship between family complex and the functioning in the group in general.

The interviews showed that all four persons repeated group behavior from their primary family in the group. All developed new sides of themselves during the three years on a personal level but as regards group behavior they were stuck in their old patterns and defense mechanisms.

“I was the child in the middle. I survived in the group the same way as I survived as a child by making sure I didn’t quarrel with anybody.”

“I didn’t really relate to the group. I had a relation to two or three people that I felt comfortable with. I shut off the rest of the group and stayed in my own little bobble.”

“I have spent a lot of energy trying to get the acceptance from other people that my mother never gave me.”

Two were painfully aware of the repetition of their old roles; the two others automatically fit in and were the nice girl and didn’t reflect upon their role and weren’t aware that they were being limited. They could reflect upon it in the interview as an afterthought, but they didn’t suffer when it happened. I interpret this as a very old and effective defense. Both of them had frozen emotions and e.g. never cried or got angry in the group.

All **four** persons felt restricted in unfolding their potential. They felt sad about it and felt they lost an opportunity to grow in the group.

Two persons said that the persons with low status in the group were the emotional ones who cried when sharing painful things. They felt it was high status to be cool and analytical. This can also be regarded as a scapegoating process, since being emotional could be the shadow of the cool persons having high status in the group. This scapegoating process was reinforced by the Head of the Institute since she didn’t show interest in the emotional level; only in the symbolic level. She didn’t explicitly say that people had to deal with their abandonment and other painful emotions in individual therapy, but she ignored them and could drive home after a session leaving a student crying.

A very interesting observation was that all the persons that were interviewed felt happy to be interviewed and felt relieved after having told their story. Two persons cried during the interview, and a strong feeling of connectedness, vitality and thankfulness arose after all interviews. It felt as if something unspeakable got expressed during the interviews – perhaps this has to do with a deep feeling of shame associated with an unconscious view that: “The group is right and I am wrong”.

Theoretical discussion

In my effort to understand what is going on in a group I will in the following be circling around the group looking at it from different angles letting different theories about groups have a say.

Jung and groups

Like in many other aspects of Jung’s writings, he is not always clear and often ambiguous in his statements about groups. Jung had his main focus on the individual.

In this context I will highlight three different aspects of group psychology that Jung does address.

The first aspect is the individual in relation to a very large group.

He states that

The psychology of a large crowd inevitably sinks to the level of mob psychology. (Jung, 1921, CW 9,1. §225)

He expresses that the dyadic relation in individual therapy has its limitations as certain aspects of the client's psyche only can be expressed in a group and can unintentionally be repressed in individual therapy. On the other hand he sees the large group becoming one collective unity that is so powerful and seductive that it can abolish the individual's consciousness. He points out that being a member of a large group can hinder the individual's confrontation with him or herself. (Jung, 1951, CW 10 §888-892)

The second aspect is about the collective in relation to individuation.

The question is to what extent individuation is a process going on in the individual separated from the group, and to which extent is it going on in an individual in a reciprocal relationship with the group?

Individuation is defined by Jung as

"... the development of the psychological *individual* as a being, distinct from the general collective psychology. Individuation, therefore, is a process of *differentiation*, having for its goal the development of the individual personality." (Jung, 1921, CW 6 §757)

Jung's definition establishes a polarity between the process of individuation and the requirements of the group. (Colman, 1995 p. 2) He emphasizes that adaptation to the collective norms is a prerequisite for individuation, followed by a differentiation from the general. (Jung, 1921 CW 6 §760-761)

Later he is expressing a rather dialectic view of the individual in relation to the group and talks about individuation bringing to birth a consciousness of human community. (Jung, 1941/1945, CW16 §227)

Still he values the individual processes much more than group processes:

"To experience transformation in a group and to experience it in oneself are two totally different things. ... A group experience takes place on a lower level of consciousness than the experience of an individual." (Jung, 1950, CW 9,1 §225) (The whole quote is in **Fejl!**
Henvisningskilde ikke fundet.)

At the same time Jung is quite clear as regards the individuating individual's duty to return value to the collective. If he doesn't do this he is a deserter. (Jung, 1916, CW 18, §1095-96)

Thirdly, I point out from Jung's writings, how he addresses the Self and group and group therapy.

In a letter of 1948 Jung says that "a positive relation between individual and society or a group is essential since no individual stands alone but depends on the symbiosis with a group. The Self, the center of the

individual is of a composite nature. It is actually a group. It is in itself collectivity and is always creating a group when it works most positively.” C.G. Jung (1973) in Thygesen 2000, p. 21³

In a letter of 1955, Jung summarizes the conclusions he has reached about group therapy:

1. Group therapy is indispensable for the formation of the social human being
2. It is not a substitute for individual therapy
3. The two forms of psychotherapy complement each other
4. The danger of group therapy is getting stuck at the collective level
5. The danger of individual analysis is to neglect social adjustment

C.G. Jung (1976), in Thygesen, 2000 p. 16⁴

Jung is quite clear and direct about the importance of the small group in these two letters, although there is no indication in his further writings that he has basically changed his mind in relation to his fundamental priority of the individual over the group.

Some post-Jungians (Colman, Zinkin, Thygesen, Kimbles, Singer and others) have elaborated on Jung's thinking and have developed theories about group processes and group complexes at different group levels (from small therapeutic groups to nations or religious groups) in a Jungian frame of understanding.

Zinkin says in relation to the individuation process:

“The shift required [*in perspective*] is not one which gives precedence to the group over the individual, but it is to see the group and the individual as two sides of the same coin. They are opposites like male and female, in that neither can be understood without the other.”
(Zinkin, 1989 p. 377)

The group

The group archetype is defined as the totality of transpersonal, interpersonal and intrapsychic processes in a group. Like all archetypes it has two poles; the group-creating pole and the individualizing pole. (Thygesen, 2000, p. 52 and 89) Arthur Colman says that the group archetype gives the group its meaning and has potential for creativity and healing. (Colman, 1995 p. 95)

Foulkes (1898-1976) was the founder of group analysis. He described the group as a functioning unit that can contain the conflict between group and individual as well as the synthesis of both to a common third; the so-called group-matrix. Matrix is a female container.

Frame, leadership and working method will affect the way the group archetype is being constellated in the group as well as the individual group members' psychological status and maturity.

If the group leader is authoritarian or just a very central figure and if some group members have a weak ego and crave for a dyadic relation, the group archetype will be constellated at the individualizing pole. In

³My translation from Danish to English.

⁴My translation from Danish to English.

this case it can be very difficult for the group members to establish a sense of affiliation to the group, and a group matrix as a safe container for the members of the group is not being developed.

Foulkes describes four levels of communication in Matrix:

1. *The Current Level*: Here the group is experienced as representing the community, public opinion, and the conductor (analyst) as a leader or authority.
2. *The Transference Level*: This second level ... is the level most often envisaged by group psychotherapists of analytic orientation by whom the group represents the family. The conductor father or mother and the other members siblings.
3. *The Level of Bodily and mental images (Projective Level)*: This level corresponds to primitive, narcissistic 'inner' object relations in psycho-analysis. ...
4. *The Primordial Level*: This fourth level is the one in which primordial images occur according to ... the existence of a collective unconscious. (Foulkes, 1964, p. 114-115)

All four levels are active all the time in a group.

A. Lorenzer (1970) distinguishes between situation and scene. The situation is what goes on in a social context at a certain moment. The scene is – translated to a Jungian terminology – the personal (family) complex that is activated in the current situation.

“When a group or a person is under pressure you are prone to activate scenes from the past in present-day situations. You don’t hear what the boss is actually saying; instead you hear your mother’s reproachful intonation.” (Visholm, 2010 p. 284)⁵

When a new group is being created, there is a potential for the individual group members to get a new and more positive experience of being in a group and thereby change old negative family complexes.

On the other hand there is a risk that the opposite happens. A situation can arise where the individual group members re-experience their negative family complexes due to projections, projective identification, splitting and scapegoating.

This happened for all four people that I interviewed.

“The group life reinforced the feeling of being wrong that I had with me when I came.”⁶

This experience can be enhanced by the fact that the group members probably hope that something different, new and positive will happen when they enter the new group as part of their dream study’.

⁵ My translation from Danish to English

⁶ Quote from the interviews.

In the case I describe in the paper, no work was done in order to raise consciousness in the group and its individuals.

Bion claims that the group is both stimulating and frustrating and anxiety-provoking (Bion, 1961 p 164). This duality and ambivalence is easily understood as part of the duality of the group archetype. The individual longs to be contained by the group but fears to lose his or her individuality.

“When I was a child and lived with my grandparents, I had to be the nice girl and not attract too much attention. In the group I chose to listen to the others even when I didn’t want to. I chose to be nice and friendly. And people liked me. It was vital for me to be popular in the group. But the prize was high. I erased myself.⁷”

Another group member did the opposite.

“In my childhood family I didn’t feel accepted. I didn’t live up to their expectations. In the group I felt there was something wrong with me, and I was afraid of being revealed and thrown out of the group. But I didn’t censor myself, even when people disliked what I did. I felt that if I wasn’t me this time, I would die.⁸”

Diversity amongst group members can be felt as a threat to the ‘we-feeling’ in the group i.e. as a threat to the coherence of the group as a whole. So there is a polarity between diversity and having the same opinions; i.e. group symbiosis. This polarity is important to deal with in order to keep the group alive and reflecting.

Recent research in professional disagreement in relational work among day care teachers shows that disagreement that is being contained in the personnel group leads to a more nuanced attitude and involvement of several perspectives in the work, whereas strong consensus can lead to important perspectives being overlooked. (Ejrnæs og Monrad, 2011 p. 40-45)

Transpersonal processes in a group

Joyce McDougall, in her book, “Theatres of the mind” (1982) uses the theatre as a metaphor for the psychic reality of a person. She writes about the inner drama where different inner personalities play their part on the stage, i.e. the internalized parents, siblings etc.

In a group, different group members may unknowingly be drawn into playing a role in another group member’s inner drama, acting it out as an outer drama. The ‘selection’ of actors happens unconsciously, and the chosen persons seem to have a ‘hook’ in the form of a personal complex, that makes them fit into the other person’s script.

In the therapeutic study group, two persons felt traumatized by each other. It seems they switched between becoming victim and victimizer in relation to each other’s inner family drama. This probably didn’t

⁷ As above.

⁸ As above.

happen on a personal but on a transpersonal level. They were both unwillingly playing a role in the others inner drama and in the drama of the group.

In my experience people who have been abused or traumatized early in life are more open to transpersonal energies and are more vulnerable to being drawn into other person's unconscious inner dramas, especially in a group setting. An explanation could be that they have been subjected to raw archetypal energy too early in life without the help from a primary caregiver to help them humanize and digest it. This has created an openness in them (a crack) in relation to transpersonal processes, and they risk becoming a transpersonal container of unbearable emotions in the group (a scapegoat).

In addition, there seem to be some almost stereotypical/archetypal roles in a group. The roles range from being 'the criticizing', 'the pleasing', 'the one being satisfied with everything', 'the practical', 'the one who keeps the group together' and 'the one who splits the group' to 'the one who goes his or her own way'. More roles can easily be identified.

The interesting thing is that these roles seem to move from one group member to another when the situation changes. If for instance a very critical group member leaves the group, a group member who used to be satisfied can suddenly be the one who is critical and dissatisfied with everything. Somebody had to take that role. It is not accidental which person 'takes over'. But it seems to happen unconsciously through transpersonal processes in the group as a whole.

The anti-group

In 1996 Morris Nitsun published the book: "The Anti-Group. Destructive forces in the group and their creative potential." Nitsun claims that Foulkes was too positive as regards group life and that he ignored some of the group's more negative aspects. Nitsun hereby adds a deeper layer of understanding of the unconscious group processes and paves the way for a transformation if the negative aspects can be integrated.

He describes destructive forces belonging to the shadow of groups. Anti-group behavior is an unconscious attack on the group and can hinder group formation. The reason for anti-group behavior can be fear and dislike of groups, hostility and anger arising in the group or spiraling destructive processes in the group (Nitsun, 1996 p. 43). In relation to Foulkes four levels of communication, anti-group behavior arises from the fourth primordial, collective unconscious level. Anti-group behavior is a kind of 'acting out' of destructive impulses and affects towards the group. (Nitsun, 1996, preface)

Anti-group behavior can be openly aggressive but it can also be a very subtle rejection of the group, e.g. walking out of the group in the middle of a teaching session or ignoring the group members only wanting to talk to the group leader. It can be underlining (false) opposites, e.g. "I am all alone in this group since I am ten years younger than the rest of you".

When anti-group behavior dominates a group, the group archetype is being 'pushed' towards the individualizing pole.

Anti-group behavior can arise when group members can't contain diversity in the group. The background can be a weak ego-structure that leads to a rejection of the group, insisting on a dyadic relation.

The anti-group behavior can be reinforced by a teacher who doesn't estimate the group as much as one-to-one relations, and therefore is more skeptical towards the group as a whole.

In the case study there was much laughter. The laughter can be interpreted as anti-group behavior. "We are not part of this emotional, crying group". Depending on perspective, the laughing can be seen as a shadow to the crying and vice versa.

Although Nitsun like Foulkes refers to group psychotherapy I think he has an important point in relation to the creative potential in the anti-group. He says:

"It is suggested that the anti-group forms an essential part of the dialectic of creative and destructive forces in group psychotherapy, that is in the movement between the two poles that the group develops, and that it is in the opposition of thesis and antithesis that a new synthesis, a transformation may take place." (Nitsun, 1996 p. 197)

He continues

"Opposites interrelate in a state of tension that also defines a state of harmony and wholeness." (Nitsun, 1996 p. 203)

Thygesen mentions that according to her experience working with the group on the primordial, archetypal level with mythological themes can overcome anti-group phenomena. (Thygesen, 2000 p. 110)

Scapegoating

According to Arthur Colman and others Scapegoating is a general process of groups. It is always at stake when something goes wrong in a group.

It is considered to be the most ancient human ritual. It is described in the third book of the Bible, chapter 16.

"In Jungian terms, scapegoating is a form of denying the shadow of both man and God ... Those who are identified with the scapegoat ... are identified with unacceptable shadow qualities. They feel inferior, rejected and guilty. They feel responsible for more than their personal share of shadow." (Perera, 1986 p. 9)

The scapegoat is created by the group. Scapegoating frees the group from the unacceptable; the evil or the wrong-doing. In scapegoating these elements are seen in the excluded scapegoat, and the remaining group can feel whole and perfect. But in splitting the shadow off the group and its individuals are not developing.

"And here we see a critical connection between the growth process in individuals and in groups, for scapegoats not only deter group development but also hamper integration of shadow projections, a necessary step in the individuation process. As long as there are scapegoats – unintegrated shadow figures for the group – integration of the shadow within the individual is an illusion." (Colman, 1995 p. 9)

In the case where the Head of the Institute through her exclusive interest in the symbolic level neglected the emotional level it was difficult to prevent the scapegoating of the emotional students. The leader was unconsciously creating a group culture where scapegoating of the emotional persons was given free rein.

The excessive laughter could be interpreted as an unconscious way for some of the group members to distance themselves from the scapegoated persons who were considered 'too' emotional and 'too' serious.

“In my experience, the most common reason for a dynamic of scapegoating to develop in an organization is fear of confronting real and imagined difference in the collective (Colman 1989). If the challenge of diversity becomes great enough to threaten the perceived cohesion, unity and ultimately the survival of the group, the group will defend itself by invoking the scapegoating process.” (Colman, 1995 p. 104)

In order to handle the scapegoating in a constructive way the group has to consider what the irritating / malfunctioning person in the group has to do with the group as a whole. What is the group projecting on this person to carry for it? To become conscious of the scapegoating processes is no easy task for a group.

“But the type of consciousness that permits witnessing this fact is not characteristic of the primitive group spirit. It must be deliberately fostered.” (Perera, 1986 p. 108)

If the group succeeds in becoming conscious of this scapegoating process, the archetype of the scapegoat can mediate between individual ego ideals and shadow projection thereby transforming the group and creating a higher level of consciousness in the group.

The dynamics of scapegoating are very closely related to the search of a savior. The scapegoat can transform into a messiah - if he or she survives.

Shame

One result from the interviews is that deep shame seems to be involved when a person doesn't feel good in a group and in scapegoating phenomena. Originally scapegoating as it is described in the Old Testament has to do with guilt; with having somebody to blame. And the scapegoated person feels guilty and has the feeling of having done something evil and wrong. (Hultberg, 1986 p. 163)

So where does the shame belong?

When deep shame is involved it has its origin at an earlier stage of development than guilt. Guilt has to do with what you do or have done. When you are guilty you can get punished and become reconciled again. Deep shame is connected to your right to exist. When shame is involved there is a much deeper fear than the one of punishment: fear of being cast out from human society. (Hultberg, 1986 p. 163) Deep shame has to do with fear of psychic annihilation.

“... burdening oneself with shame goes beyond the norms of society; one stops being a human being. This burden includes a feeling of humiliation and worthlessness which gives shame its torturing character.” (Hultberg, 1986 p. 164)

The scapegoated individual feels guilty, and feels the deep shame of being utterly wrong and worthless.

“I felt very alone in the group. Sometimes I felt invisible. Just like in my childhood. I withdrew from the group and stayed in my room in the evenings to protect myself from being rejected.⁹”

It is very shameful to feel that you don't belong to the group and don't even have the *right* to belong to the group.

Personal complexes in the group

How much of the suffering is due to the personal complexes – and how much is due to malfunctioning / lack of consciousness in the group?

When you have worked through your basic complexes in individual therapy your ego has become stronger and you are less vulnerable and more capable of containing your emotions. Therefore you are less prone to get caught in old complex reactions in a group context. This means that it should be easier for you to be in a group without re-experiencing old roles and reactions.

On the other hand you can never work through all your personal complexes, and being in a group seems to bring you in contact with unconscious group experiences from your primary family that can be hard to work through in individual therapy. The individual therapy is carried out at a dyadic level while being in a group involves the triadic level or a multi-person level, which produces very different challenges for the individual and can reveal wounding that is not discovered in the dyadic relation.

The dyadic relation involves emotions like abandonment, separation anxiety, fear of annihilation, the basic fault (Balint), narcissistic rage, envy, deep shame etc. and the early defenses like control, splitting and denial.

The triadic or oedipal level involves emotions like fear of being excluded, rivalry, ability to express aggression constructively, jealousy etc. and some more mature defenses like the ability to postpone a conflict, self-control etc.

All these things you don't necessarily learn in individual analysis. And when you can't function adequately in a group, you get overwhelmed by the emotions from the dyadic level, e.g. abandonment, fear of annihilation, basic fault and not least the deep shame.

The setting and the group culture

L. Zinkin discusses the group setting and how rules are being changed by the group, when it develops. He refers to a group analytic setting where the group members can talk about anything they like. His point is that changes are made in a creative process by the group as a whole.

“I am suggesting that these changes, which can be very subtle, are not just people changing within the group setting. They are, but in addition, they produce an actual change of the setting itself, bringing about an evolutionary step in the group structure.” (Zinkin, 1989 p. 375)

⁹ Quote from the interviews.

I think this is happening in all groups. In the actual group there was, as mentioned, a lot of loud laughter, especially in breaks. This was prominent during all three years, but it was reduced gradually. No clear decision was made about it, but it changed – perhaps due to a decrease in the level of anxiety in the group. And the result was a more relaxed atmosphere in the group.

The group setting and the rules are part of what you could call the group culture.

Beyond scapegoating – King Arthur’s Round Table

Both Colman and Zinkin are using the myth of the Grail to describe a vision of a group functioning beyond scapegoating.

“The Grail stories are about a precious and mysterious container and present the problem of finding it. They present also the opposition between individual and group, in that it is the heroic individual who is destined to reach it, but for the benefit of the group. Both the transformation of the group *and* the transformation of the individual is brought about in the course of the story.” (Zinkin, 1989 p. 385)

“King Arthur’s Round Table ... [has a combination] of interactively authorized leadership and deeply felt group responsibility and connectedness, as well as its commitment to serve not only Table members but the collective as a whole. ...

The table symbolizes the induction of a new societal Self, a new world order brought about by emphasizing the conjunction of difference – youth and age, various nationalities and talents – through a physical form that symbolizes social and spiritual equality.” (Colman, 1995 p. 84)

Being part of such a group where everybody is equal and the best point of view wins requires discipline, consciousness and training – and authorized leadership. King Arthurs Knights were being trained before they could enter the group.

In such a group everybody is striving for individuation on a personal level and on a group level.

Colman points out that this vision doesn’t contain human shadow. But it does “inspire change toward more inclusive group and political development.” (Colman, 1995 p. 85)

Some of the training ‘to become a Knight’ could be the personal therapy that you undergo while you attend a therapeutic education. But in the individual therapy you are in the dyadic relation. Becoming a Knight requires group skills and group commitment. How can that become developed in modern therapeutic study groups?

What it the pain about?

One result from the interviews is that some group members felt that it was very painful to be in the group.

The pain has to do with

- re-experiencing unbearable patterns and emotions from our childhood family, not being seen as me, feeling excluded or only included if such and such... Even re-traumatizing by the group was experienced by some of the students.

“It was actually quite double. I knew that the group was malfunctioning, just as I knew that there was something wrong in my family when I was a child. So I was critical and at the same time I felt utterly wrong. It was so awful.¹⁰”

- scapegoating due to the group’s need for somebody to carry its shadow.
- not being able to endure diversity in the group.
- not being able to realize and tolerate? one’s own shadow.
- not being able to function in a group and therefore becoming overwhelmed by emotions belonging to the dyadic level.
- fear of losing yourself in the group or getting excluded if you keep your individuality. and not being able to hold the tension between these two poles.

All this gives rise to a feeling of deep shame.

Zinkin says:

Sometimes it is clear that an individual cannot change unless the group changes. Perhaps this is always the case. (Zinkin, 1989 p. 380)

Following this line of thought the pain could be about feeling locked in a group that doesn’t develop.

Ways to ease the pain

My major interest in this work about groups is to find ways to relieve the pain in the life of a study group. The general hypothesis is that this can only be achieved if more attention is paid to the role and value of group processes in the task that is learning, and of course anti-task elements. Headline is making group processes more conscious.

“The goal is to build a culture which awakens consciousness and values exploration and inquiry into its own processes.” (Colman, 1995 p. 120)

In the interview one person mentioned that a solution could be having an empathic group leader holding the group. But that wouldn’t make the processes conscious or make the group and its individual members develop. It would make the group a safe place and prevent the unconscious processes to take over as long as the group was in charge. But the group processes would still be unconscious.

I have identified five approaches where work can be done to create improvements in the group life and create consciousness of the group processes. In my view they supplement each other.

¹⁰ Quote from the interviews.

1. Learning about collective processes
2. Working with the group culture
3. Sharing experiences of being in the group
4. Consciousness of the individual group member's family complex
5. Working at the symbolic level
 - a. The group myth
 - b. Making a symbolic picture of the group

Learning about collective processes

A seminar placed early in the education about unconscious group processes and individual family complexes on a theoretical and a personal level could create awareness in the group and a form a basis for dealing with problems in the group as they arise.

“If one is part of a collective that scapegoats and is afraid to look for help outside itself, learning more about collective process in general may be of some help.” (Colman, 1995 p. 122)

Steen Visholm says – using Bion's concept of basic assumptions on Lorenzer's situations and scenes:

“The family dynamic basic assumptions are thus such scenes that pop up in groups and organizations. The scenes make no sense in the current situation, but by identifying the family dynamic, that is the content of the scene, it becomes possible to relate more freely to the situation in the group or the organization.” (Visholm, 2010 p. 285)¹¹

Working with the group culture

A way of dealing with the sometimes psychotic processes that arise in groups that the organization fails to find containing structures for – and thereby easing the pain - could be by working consciously with the group setting, the rules and the group culture. “The group norms should be examined and evaluated regularly in order to identify negative or destructive processes and to help the group becoming more conscious of itself.” (Thygesen, 2000 p. 93)¹²

The working method could be the spiral conversation¹³.

The group must have a goal and a direction. In the case of the therapist training, the goal could be formulated something like this: The goal of the therapeutic group is the achievement of therapeutic methods through practical exercises, sharing with the group and theoretical considerations.

¹¹ My translation from Danish to English.

¹² My translation from Danish to English.

¹³ A spiral conversation is a kind of dialogue, where you speak in turns one at a time. You take a round where everyone has the possibility to say something, while the others listen. Everybody can choose to say pass if they don't have anything to say. You take as many rounds as there is need for, and optimally you don't stop until everybody has said pass.

And the group must have a similarly clear *purpose*. It could be to create a group culture with consciousness of its own processes, where the individuals are supported by the group to do away with old patterns and roles and experiment with new ways of functioning in a group, and to get the possibility to unfold their potential and talent.

Sharing experiences of being in the group

What about the shame? How do you deal with that?

Shame has to do with the narcissistic wounding and early abandonment and is eased by a non-interpretive atmosphere of containment and mirroring as pointed out by Jacoby, Asper, Balint, Kohut and others.

Perhaps the methods of sharing in a non-judgmental setting used in the Twelve-Steps Program first published in the 1939 book "Alcoholics Anonymous" could be used to ease the shame. This requires a firm holding of the frame.

Consciousness of the individual group member's family complex

Basically this deep work to become conscious of one's own family complex belongs to the individual therapy, since the group is a study group and not a therapeutic group. Insights and overall pictures of the individual group member's family complexes can advantageously be shared with the group. This can make it easier for the group members to understand each other and understand what is going on in the group.

Working at the symbolic level

As mentioned earlier, working with the group at the symbolic level can process some of the unconscious group phenomena. I give two examples of such symbolic work here.

a) The group myth

A way of raising consciousness in the group and build a healthy group culture without scapegoating could be by working with the myth of the group using the myth of King Arthur's Knights and the round Table as inspiration. This work must include working with diversity and group shadow. The group must develop ways to handle disagreements.

Using this myth raises the question about leadership. King Arthur was the leader of the Knights. Can a study group who has different teachers at each seminar have a leader among themselves, and can the leadership rotate among group members? Or should the Institute provide a leader to support these processes?

It is crucial that the initiatives taken support collective development of the group as a whole to induce changes to emerge from within rather than from outside.

This raises still another question about how much time and resources should be used in order to improve group life.

b) Making a symbolic picture of the group

Arthur Colman describes a method of working creatively with the group as a whole that he and his colleague Pilar Montero have used in their professional work with groups¹⁴. The method resembles

¹⁴ As described by Arthur Colman in a Skype conversation between him and me, January the 5th 2015.

Sandplay therapy, but the symbolic figures used are larger, about 20-30 cm high. The group is asked to make a picture on the floor or on a very big table. Very little instruction is given in order to facilitate a flowing, spontaneous process. Each group member can choose symbolic figures and place them in the picture. The figures don't represent individual group members but different aspects of the group as a whole. It is allowed for everybody to move the figures around and add new figures.

You could add a reflecting talk about the picture and what it shows about the processes in the group. This could be done once or twice a year in order to maintain attention on the wellbeing of the group.

Conclusion

Taking my starting point in a case study of a therapeutic study group, I have explored different aspects of group life. I have defined the concept of a family complex and have investigated how family complexes in a therapeutic study group continue to influence the persons' well-being and ability to unfold their potential when the family complexes are unattended and group processes remain unconscious. I have observed a lot of pain related to the repetition of old family patterns and not feeling good in the study group.

I have looked into Jung's writings with his focus on the individual in relation to the group and have followed post Jungians in their efforts to develop a broader Jungian concept of groups. Making use of theory and practice of group therapy I have been looking at aspects of the group as a whole including unconscious processes of group life.

With humility and awareness of the complexity of the problems of group life and the strong and at times even dangerous unconscious forces at stake, I have tried to identify why it is so painful not to feel well in a group and I have searched for ways to foster understanding and find meaning – and thereby ease the pain. A 'solution' is not close at hand. It is an ongoing process; a striving for all humans.

I will let Colman and Jung have the last word.

"To fulfill our potential as humans is the unifying principle, the hope, the great motivator of our species. And in our full potential we are not separated I's. Each individual is also part of the group, and each group is a unity with its own mysteries and its own journey towards wholeness. ... Jung's premise about the reality of the psyche, the collective unconscious, can be paraphrased thus: we, this group that we are, is an awareness we all share, one that profoundly affects us at the most fundamental levels (Jung, 1958, par. 655)." (Colman, 1995 p. 55)

Literature

W. R. Bion (1968)	Experiences in Groups and other papers	Routledge
Arthur Colman (1995)	Up from Scapegoating	Chiron Publications
S. H. Foulkes (1983)	Introduction to Group-Analytic Psychotherapy	Maresfield Reprints
Per Hultberg (1986)	Shame: An Overshadowed emotion	Tenth International Congress of Analytical Psychology, Berlin 1986
C. G. Jung (1916)	CW 18	Bollingen Series, Princeton
C. G. Jung (1921)	CW 6	Bollingen Series, Princeton
C. G. Jung (1921)	CW 9,1	Bollingen Series, Princeton
C. G. Jung (1941/1945)	CW16	Bollingen Series, Princeton
C. G. Jung (1951)	CW 10	Bollingen Series, Princeton
Steinar Kvale (1996)	InterViews	Sage Publications Inc.
Ejrnæs og Monrad (2011)	Pædagogers uenighed - svaghed eller styrke	Tidsskriftet VERA 54 (marts), p. 40-45
Morris Nitsun (1996)	The Anti-group	Routledge
Silvia Brenton Perera (1986)	The Scapegoat Complex	Inner City Books
Andrew Samuels (2001)	Politics on the Couch	Profile Books
Thomas Singer and Samuel L. Kimbles (2004)	The Cultural Complex	Brunner-Routledge
Bente Thygesen (2000)	Grupper individuation	Dansk Psykologisk Forlag
Steen Visholm (2010)	Grupper	Frydenlund
L. Zinkin (1989)	The Grail and the Group	Journal of Analytical Psychology 34, 371-386