Identity and personality disorders in group analytic psychotherapy

Trastornos de personalidad e identidad en un grupo de psicoterapia analítica

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Abstract

The phenomena inherent in the organization of personality and its constitution of identity in group dynamics starts from an accurate theoretical study that translates into a punctual system inserted in the clinical application context. The epistemological and methodological framework, following the neotenic and the biopsychocultural models that place the clinical and intervention perspective within the matrix and the group experience, connects the most advanced scientific studies of an anthropological, neuropsychological and psychodynamic nature. The group discovers and shows the double imaginary (the symbolpoietic and the etiological) as a manifestation of creative dynamics and what is called malignant narcissism. The therapeutic Group offers us a cross-section of the whole of humanity, biologically linked to an endless childhood, whose future is decidedly uncertain, due to an omnipotent "adultomorphic" armor that denies the Other and endangers the very life of the other creatures of our planet.

Key words
Identity, symbolopoietic imaginary, personality disorders, neotenic matrix

Resumen

Se plantean las posibilidades que las Los fenómenos inherentes a la organización de la personalidad y la constitución de su identidad en la dinámica de grupo parten de un estudio teórico preciso y de su traducción en un sistema determinado que se inserta en el contexto de la clínica. Este marco epistemológico y metodológico enlaza con los estudios científicos más avanzados de carácter antropológico, neuropsicológico y psicodinámico, siguiendo los modelos neoténico y biopsicocultural que sitúan la perspectiva clínica y de intervención dentro de la matriz y la experiencia grupal. El grupo descubre y muestra así el doble imaginario (el simbolismo-poiético y el etiológico) como manifestación de la dinámica creativa y de lo que se denomina narcisismo maligno. El Grupo Terapéutico nos ofrece así una muestra representativa de toda la humanidad, biológicamente ligada a una infancia sin fin cuyo futuro es decididamente incierto, debido a una omnipotente coraza "adultomorfa" que niega al Otro y pone en peligro la vida misma de las demás criaturas de nuestro planeta.

Palabras clave
identidad, imaginario símbolo poiético, trastornos de personalidad, matriz neoténica

INTRODUCTION

According to the guidelines of the DSM[1] personality disorder refers to a structure of articulated characteristics of the personality and processes that can be statistically attributed to members of a population. Such structure is given by rigid and non-adaptive personality traits, which cause a significant impaired functioning in cultural contexts, at the level of interactive processes with other people. Those difficulties may be associated with symptomatic complications.

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1. In the last seventy years, personality disorders have been elaborated several times by the diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders of the American Psychiatric Association.

In the 1952 revision of the psychiatric nomenclature inherent to the DSM, personality disorders were similar to character disorders according to the conceptual paradigms of Adolph Meyer, characterized by the notion of "reaction type": they were grouped into the following items: 1. structural disorders of weight (character); 2. disorders of emotional personality traits and sociopathic disorders of the personality. In the 1968 review (DSM2), the spectrum of disorders widened greatly, to include non-psychotic disorders and forms of malfunction of conduct, which emerge in adolescence and stabilize in adult life. A negative type of behavior for the self and others was stated. It is in the analysis of the paranoid personality that, for the first time, the relationship between personality disorders and affective family models, agents in the identification processes, was highlighted. In this sense, the family group, especially at the level of the parental couple, takes the characteristics of a pathological matrix. In DSM III (the third edition of the DSM published in January 1980) the definition of personality traits is revisited, in terms of constant ways of perceiving, relating to and thinking about the environment and oneself and we can observe a first comparison between the affective dimension of the personality tract and the Junghian notion of complex. In DSM IV personality disorders assume the characteristic of implying the dimension of the internal world, which presents itself in decisional dystonic modes with respect to the dominant culture. In DSM V personality disorders are divided into three groups: paranoid, schizoid, schizotypal, antisocial, borderline, istrionic, narcissistic avoiding, addictive, obsessive-compulsive.

The Psychodynamic Diagnostic Manual[2] has elaborated the notion of Personality Disorder differently, implanting a real Psychodynamic Descriptive Psychiatry. The assumptions that guided the drafting of the Manual are oriented around the concept that the personality represents the context within which psychopathology develops and takes on its meaning. From this point of view, it is of fundamental importance to analyze the articulation of identity in order to consider the type of organization it assumes at a personological level.

Personality and the related disorders do not exclusively concern a particular sector of psychopathology, but, in a broader conception, concern the stable modes of thought and the system of existential values of a person. In other words, the Manual is focused on features of the person more than on those of the disorder.

In this sense, the approach perspective involves a much broader and more complex area inherent in the multidimensionality of the person, including the wounds and defenses that have arisen in the course of their existential development.

Based on this prototypical perspective, the behavioral expression of identity moves on a continuum that proceeds from healthy to psychotic organization, thus including neurotic and borderline organization. This is the assumption on which Otto Kenberg's approach is based, in a continuum between healthy and pathological that is divided into three fronts: neurotic, borderline and psychotic. The criteria that identify and differentiate membership in one or another organization concern identity, in terms of dissemination or integration of identity. The first is characterized by a sense of inner emptiness and makes the experience of oneself discontinuous.

Otto Kenberg introduced the malignant narcissism syndrome which can be considered the specific pathology of the collective. It is a transversal syndrome of the organization of the personality as it embraces all the complications of narcissism, affecting the narcissistic personality disorder and the antisocial one, then focusing on the paranoid and sadistic traits of the personality disorder.

The PDM2 - Childhood and Adolescence is aimed at the 0-18 years age group, expanding on the problem of the evolution of personality disorders during childhood and adolescence. In particular, in the evolution of personality in preschool age (especially when language skills have not yet been developed), the study of family matrices and the related transgenerational cultural horizons becomes crucial for the purposes of identity articulations. We are in the area of cultural models in reference to the "in-culturative" role, exercised by the family in childhood experiences.

In the spring of 1936, under the direction of Abrahm Kardiner, a series of seminars began at the Psychiatric Institute of Columbia University aimed at comparing the psychoanalytic metapsychological construction with the theoretical heritage provided by cultural anthropology, relating to the study of cultural variables and their impact on the development of the personality. Participants in these seminars included scholars such as Ralph Linton, Ruth Benedict Geoffrey Gorer, and Cora du Bois. The research of anthropologists and psychoanalysts gave rise to the so-called Rubric of Culture and Personality.

With the term of "Basic Personality", the Anthropological School of Culture and Personality indicates entities ranging from the group to the tribe, from the modern state to a cultural area or to a civilization as a whole. The "Basic Personality" can be described as a universe of psychic representations invested within a cultural area, and can be defined in terms of interactive behaviors. Examples of Basic Personality analyzed by Geoffrey Gorer and Ruth Benedict are the Russian personality and the Japanese personality.

FROM THE GROUP TO THE IMAGINARY: THE SYMBOLPOIETIC AND ETIOLOGICAL DYNAMICS IN THE CREATION OF IDENTITY

Identity is the continuation of the psyche, thanks to memory, over time, which can be transmitted from generation to generation, so that the basic personality of a subject, in its development, carries within it all the influences of the family past. This original identity constitutes the affective basis of the ways of being, thinking and acting of the basic personality, predisposed by the family psychic field as a basic device of affective significance.

Margaret Mead hypothesized an interpretation of Culture in terms of historically modeled systems that each individual, at the generational level and throughout his life, contributes to reinterpreting its forms. An innovative position with respect to the studies of 'Culture and Personality' is due to Erik Erikson (Menarini R., 1982) who came to apply the notion of cultural identity to national states. Speaking of the interdependence between culture and personality, he discovered the emergence of conflicts due to historical processes of change (diachronic study of culture) that produce a loss of cultural identity. Crucial examples are wars, epidemics and racist nationalist ideologies. In the field of Analytical Psychology, Hans Dieckmann developed a theory of complexes, according to which the latter include groups: for example, the

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2. he PDM 2 describes 12 personality syndromes: depressive, dependent, anxious-avoidant and phobic, obsessive-compulsive, schizoid, somatizing, hysterical, narcissistic, paranoid, psychopathic, sadistic and borderline.

complex of nationalistic magnitude or the ethnocentric and racial one. In this context, we can argue that the ideological imagination has a complex basis. It is a vision of the complex as a group personality disorder.

The structural analysis of the system responsible for the assimilation and transmission of culture (system of personality) must address the problem of inculturation. The basic cultural unit is the family identity for which in each individual there is a substrate created by the family environment of their childhood (family matrix), which will produce defensive reactions by mobilizing projective systems.

Anthony Wallace (1961) defined a particular deductive method, through which it is possible to combine ethnological description with psychological analysis. In this sense, history, folklore, myths, legends, religious rites and the economic relations of a cultural group are interpreted as if they were psychic productions of an inner world aimed at redefining cultural identity. The family acts in transforming the transgenerational culture into cultural identity, while the personality carries out the task of structuring the collective imagination. Cultural identity is defined as the way in which people orient their behavior. The personality of individuals can take many forms, but these forms have a close relationship in common with the psychic foundation of group culture. According to Kardiner, the basic personality structure does not correspond to the total personality of the individual, but to his projective systems, which are the basis of the configuration of subjectivity, thus promoting identification functions. The projective system created by the inner world fits into the culture of belonging, having the psychological capacity to stage it, founding new cultural themes. The projective systems will form the cultural themes of the imaginary[3] that are the basis of the "symbolopoietic imaginary", inherent in the construction of one's own subjective identity through the inner world. The term 'symbolopoietic' refers both to the symbolic dimension of the inner world and to the poiesis. The defense mechanism that allows one of a projective system to constitute itself as a symbolopoietic imaginary is sublimation[4]. The defense mechanism of negation is instead the prerogative of an etiological or ideological imaginary.

The Middle Ages stood out as an era particularly invested

by symbolopoietic imaginary. From the 6th to the 14th century, this imagery became the eye of an inner world aimed at the perception of the mystery of the psyche's identity. In "De Genesi ad Litteram" St. Augustine visualizes the imaginary as a set of all existing things considered as "Signa" that refer to the image of the Creator understood as the "Sapientia" of Creation.

In psychological terms, all this means that the universe of created events (psychic events), which pass through the person, are the origin of symbolic knowledge.

Symbolicity is not a property of the act but of the ways in which the act is conceived in the inner world. In "De Trinitate", St. Augustine establishes a difference between creative imaginary and arbitrary and false imaginary. In the latter, the images are experienced as real. In "De Civitate Dei", this false imaginary can rise to the personification of Evil, as an expression of Power and Mass, deceiving the senses of men with false appearances, doing real imaginary things (Agostino, op.cit, Book XX, chap. 19). This demonic personality, which I have called etiological narcissism since it is the foundation of all personality disorders, constitutes the maximum exasperation of narcissistic closure.

According to Erich Fromm it represents "the quintessence of evil" and corresponds to the personological portrait of Adolf Hitler. It is malignant narcissism, a deep abyss of the destructiveness of our species. Malignant narcissism is characterized by simple emotions: hatred, resentment, revenge, victimhood, joy at the suffering of others. Often the original family is highly depreciated so that the Child is replaced by the ideation of an unborn Child, as frozen by the pathological narcissistic structures of the adult that block the birth of identity.

A particular form of malignant narcissism is the "inferior narcissism" of infanticide (R. Menarini, V. Montefiori 2013). It is a phenomenon that has always been present in the history of humanity, practised in the past in the form of ritual sacrifice and then developed due to a deformity of the infant or for the demographic control of girls. In reality it is not a phenomenon that is now extinct, since in the 21st century, in Italy, every year, on average, fifteen children die, killed by their mothers.

In 2010, within the Judicial Psychiatric Hospital of Castiglione delle Stiviere in Mantua, I carried out some analytical group research with two colleagues, Valentina Stranges and Veronica Montefiori, on a group of

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3. Dante Alighieri, in Purgatory, gives us the first intuition of the concept of 'imaginary'.
"*O immaginativa che ne rube talvolta sì di fuor, ch' om non s' accorge perché dintorno suon in mille tube, che i move te, se'l senso non ti porge*" (Canto XVII). Italo Calvino has masterfully translated the triplets in this way: "*O imagination that you have the power to impose on our faculties and our will and to kidnap us in an inner world by tearing us away from the outside world, so much so that even if a thousand trumpets sounded there are none would we realize, where do the visual messages you receive come from, when they are not formed by sensations stored in the memory?*" (Italo Calvino, 1988).

4. The symbolopoietic imagery is introduced by Dante Alighieri with the term 'high fantasy': "*A l 'alta fantassia here I can't; but my desire and velle were already turning, yes as it rotates that is equally moved, the love that moves the sun and the other stars*". (145, Paradiso Canto XXXIII)

infanticide mothers. The results of the research revealed in these women the presence of an inner world which is empty and without representations, unless it is Art Brut. This type of art was baptized in 1945 by the French painter Jean Dubuf with the intention of indicating the production of artistic works, created by people far from the cultural world: marginalized, excluded, self-taught prisoners and mentally ill. In infanticidal women, a first, albeit difficult passage towards the symbolopoietic imaginary is offered by this artistic activity. We have interpreted these imaginative forms as if they were images of group dreams. The most significant icon was that of the Spider, archetype of the Great negative Mother, embodied, according to Analytical Psychology, by Medea, who kills her children to take revenge on Jason. In fact, one of the main reasons for infanticide is revenge against one's husband. It is as if the couple's hatred focuses on the generative project of the couple. This project is symbolically represented by the archetypal image of the Child. This image is a symbol of the Selbst, the realization of which Jung calls individuation.

The Child is aimed at "formally" conceiving the collective unconscious[5].

Infanticide forms the basis for severing emotional family ties. My studies on Nazi ideology (R. Menarini, 2008) have shown how, in this ideology, there was precisely the severing of the original family emotional ties which were replaced by those of the divine power of a savior (Hitler) who gave back to the people their goods stolen by the enemies of the nation (Jews). As mentioned earlier, malignant narcissism triumphs in war interactions.

PERSONALITY, MATRIX AND NEOTENIC FUNCTION IN THERAPEUTIC GROUPS.

During the Second World War, S.H. Foulkes experimented with analytic group psychotherapy with patients suffering from war trauma, discovering the profound relationship that unites the pathology with the interactions present in the social field. From Foulkes's point of view, collective formations take on a psychological dimension in the interactive system of the personality. All of this represents the way in which a multiplicity is constituted in family, clan, tribe, class, community, and state. Group analysis (this is the name that encompasses the main concepts of analytic group psychotherapy) has as its premise the Gestalt theory and that of the field.

From this point of view, Personality is founded on a universe of psychic investments linked to psychic structures with a strong representative character or Gestalten, that is, to forms that allow the establishment of a mental field or Matrix. It is a particular identity-family environment system, experienced as a natural environment. The Matrix is basically a network of connections between mental events, a privileged Gestalt of psychic representations (original values) inherent in the inner world and its cultural sphere. The Matrix therefore embraces the whole person and the environment affected by it. I debated the concept of the Matrix in a seminar held by Sigmund Foulkes, under the direction of Fabrizio Napolitani, held at the Associazione Gruppoanalitica Romana, on May 30, 1974.

Sigmund Foulkes illustrated how the interaction matrix in the therapeutic group represents a classic example of a complex network, in which the nodal points (patients) are also the nodal points of another network: the primary one of the family plexus. On that occasion I connected the concept of original identity with that, proposed by Foulkes, of Foundation Matrix. According to Foulkes, the Foundation Matrix (basic matrix) is constituted by the transpersonal psychic layer, which we all have in common, since it is connected with the biological properties of the species and inherent in the ability to produce culture. It is therefore an unconscious matrix of our species, within which group psychic processes are modeled.

I then introduced a profound relationship between the notion of Foundation Matrix and that of Neotenia. It defines a particular biopsychic situation for which embryonic elements long after birth remain with the evolutionary aim of maintaining a high degree of plasticity in the brain tissue and psychic structures. This phenomenology occurs within a family matrix, which makes it possible to expand the learning processes throughout the life span, starting with inculturation.

I therefore highlighted a correspondence between the Basic Matrix and Neoteny for the purpose of research on the disorder at the origins of man's personality. The etiology of this basic pathology, which affects the psychic dimension of culture, may be hypothetically connected to the prematurity of the sapiens species; its non-definitive maturation which places it in the delicate position within which, paradoxically, its very survival on the planet is jeopardized. Giuseppe Nucari identified,

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5. The concept of the Child is considered fundamental by the great physicist Wolfgang Pauli (1900-1958), winner of the Nobel Prize in 1945 for his discovery of the principle of exclusion, fundamental in quantum mechanics, which states that the same energy state cannot be occupied by two electrons. According to Pauli, the concept of the Child is connected to the notion of 'Hintergrundsphysik', which denotes the presence of quantitative ideas and concepts of physics together with those of the psyche, in an iconic structure. The basic archetype of the Child is presented both on an objective and subjective level. In fact, Pauli's 'Background Physics' concerns how the events of microphysics refer to archetypes, to the extent that their mirroring, in the psychic sphere, is an irreplaceable condition for the very possibility of their knowledge. The existence of the complementarity in physics between energy and time presents an analogy with the psychic concepts of the unconscious and conscious.

with the term Neotenic Matrix, the collective unconscious of our species. My subsequent studies enabled me to highlight how the Neotenic Matrix was characterized by two foundations depending on the predominance of two polarities called unsaturated matrix and saturated matrix. The unsaturated matrix concerns the configuration of a group psychic field observable in terms of symbolopoietic imaginary, whose representations are configured as the ideation of a healthy narcissistic center, around which all the prospects for the future development of the new born fluctuate. This group foundation of the original identity is presented, in the Therapeutic Group, thanks to the Dynamic Matrix that concerns the personification of Personality Disorder. For Foulkes, the task of the conductor of a therapeutic group is not only to uncover the hidden meanings underlying the pathology but to identify its interactive forms; he calls this process 'localization'. According to this notion, patients (foreground figures) operate against the background of scenarios, reflecting the etiological characteristics of their personality disorder. In the Therapeutic Group, the Unsaturated Matrix and the Saturated Matrix continually manifest themselves in the transference relationships and in the acting that characterize the various sessions. These two Foundations alternate, taking the form of symbolopoietic imaginary and etiological imaginary.

At the level of malignant narcissism, the latter presents itself as a Double of the former. The discovery of the Double, which appears under highly seductive guise, can be traced back to Oscar Wilde, thanks to his masterpiece "The portrait of Dorian Gray", in which he makes Lord Henry Wotton say: "Now, wherever you go, you charm the world. Will it always be so?"

The Therapeutic Group is presented as a personological universe of imaginative perceptions and emotions that take the form of a narrative plot.
The symbolopoietic imaginary developed particularly in the Middle Ages, consisting of psychic images that took the name of 'Mirabilia'. The root of the term 'Mir' (hence Miror and Mirari) denotes something alive. There is therefore a juxtaposition between Mirari, Mirabilia (wonder) and Miroir. This last term refers to the Latin Speculum and the Italian 'Mirror'. 'Mirroring' is the way through which the symbolopoietic imaginary locates the etiological imaginary. This iconic and symbolopoietic imaginary is therefore contrasted by the etiological imaginary of the personal matrix.
The latter is made up of an ethiopathogenetic imaginary characterized by visual appearances with a strong suggestive value that are experienced as reality, through the equality between narrative structure and pathological structure as happens in Delirium.

Group analysis is a methodology that through Speculative Reactions allows the 'Location' of the pathological mental universe called 'Personal Matrix' by Sigmund Foulkes. The Mirror Reactions are Resonance and Mirroring. Resonance is a perceptual modality inherent in other characters. The opposite of Resonance is Extraction when, in the presence of a personality disorder characterized by Malignant Narcissism, the patient, the carrier of the disorder, refuses to enter the scene. The Resonance can evolve into Mirroring or Mirroring, which can be described as the recognition of parts of one's personality in the way of being of other patients.
The interactions have a conflictual nature (Personality Disorders) and it is for this reason that the Location configures the inherent Dramatis Persona that is the personification of conflicts. This personification is connected with the onset of the Dynamic Matrix, thanks to the reactivation of the conditions of the personal matrices. To a certain extent, it is the group equivalent of the transference neurosis that is observed explicitly in the psychoanalytic relationship.

Edward Glover (1971) elaborated the concept of transference in its meaning of an analytic setting, which is configured in an isomorphic way to symptomatic formation. In the setting, the domination of the conflictual situation would shift from internal personological maladjustments to the analytic situation. The unsaturated matrix allows the emergence of the Dynamic Matrix, that is, that relational network with a generative function of the psychic subject, free to reflect itself in one's own inner world. In the Therapeutic Group, it develops in the Dynamic Matrix made up of Themes of the group narrative that form the script of the session. They are the basis of the stage configuration or shared vision that patients have of what emerges in the session. These patients construct themselves as Dramatis Personae, that is, 'Characters of the Drama', a name that until the seventeenth century denoted the element of characters in a dramatic work. The processes of personification, which take place in the Therapeutic Group, consist of representing the unconscious processes in the form of a Person. In group-analytic treatment, personification takes place in the mirror of the Group itself. The symbolopoietic imaginary is psychically established, at the level of emotional experience, as the appearance of a reflex narcissism.
The Dramatis Persona is verifiable in Personation, that characteristic for which the inner world of each patient is staged in the entire group. By group theme we then mean the decline of the etiological themes underlying Personality Disorders at the level of Dramatis Persona.
In the group-analytic situation, one patient's world of affects is simultaneously an affective source for another

patient. From this point of view, the group emotional space is the place where the affective exchange is closely connected to the observer-observed dyad.

CONCLUSION

In the course of fifty years of group-analytic practice, I am convinced that the relational mechanisms existing between the Dynamic Matrix (as a separate psychic network), the single individual and the relationships between individuals, are the basis of a particular semantic elevation which, at the level of the relationships between the psychic functions of the Ego (Language, Perception, Memory and Learning), produces an extraordinary enrichment of the cognitive and emotional learning capacities of the Ego. This complex phenomenology corresponds to Ego Training in action, which is the purpose of group therapeutic treatment.

Ego Training in action can be defined as the basis of the profound relationship that unites the Identity to the Therapeutic Group. It allows a particular semantic elevation that allows the Ego to reach the Other. Semantic elevation has a biopsychocultural equivalent in the discovery of Bootstrapping.

Gerald Edelman (1929-2014), director of the Institute of Neuroscience and the Department of Neurobiology of the Scripps Research Institute of La Jolla in California, introduced the concept of Bootstrapping in terms of a semantic self-elevation, produced by the transformation of the environment. This occurs thanks to semantic exchanges with emotionally significant people, who favor the transition from the ecological niche of the Self to the real world of Identity that includes the Other. Ego Training in action, at the level of the Therapeutic Group, allows you to study the mental functions of the ego, deepening the study of their biopsychocultural bases: Foundation matrix or Neotenic Matrix and Dynamic Matrix (unsaturated matrix).

In this context, the Personal Matrix (saturated matrix) enables us to understand personality disorders such as a failure of the Identity identification process. A Double takes the place of the I and kills the Other. From this point of view, the Therapeutic Group offers us a cross-section of the whole of humanity, biologically linked to an endless childhood whose future is decidedly uncertain, due to an omnipotent "adultomorphic" armor that denies the Other and endangers the very life of the other creatures of our planet.

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