



From implication to elaboration: a group-based experience in clinical sociology

De la implicación a la elaboración: una experiencia grupal en sociología clínica

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article was to discuss the subjective and group effects of participation in the socio-clinical intervention Group of Implication and Research (GIR), based on the analysis of implications. Through the authors' participation in a Life History and Social-Professional Trajectory GIR, this article explored the reflexive and emotional dimensions of the central theme contemporary work, along with the social-psychic effects from participating in several intervention tools and techniques. Few research articles in the literature (especially in Brazil) can be found about this methodological support of clinical sociology and/or its tools. Most intellectual work focused on theoretical, methodological, and intervention aspects, with little attention given to participants' perspectives. The following sections present different aspects of the involvement with this GIR and its intervention tools. Further, we discussed some of its effects, including an analysis of the authors' implications. The experiences reported in this article occurred in a specific group context, with the acquiescence of the participants and guarantee of confidentiality. The data used in the article were anonymized and used for intellectual and formative purposes, respecting the principles of sensitive listening, ethical responsibility, and non-exposure of third parties.

Keywords: Clinical sociology; Psicossociologia; Group of implication and research; Analysis of implication.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es discutir los efectos subjetivos y grupales de la participación en el Grupo de Implicación e Investigación (GIR), una intervención sócio-clínica, a partir de un análisis de implicaciones. A través de la participación de las autoras en el GIR "Historia de Vida y Trayectoria Socioprofesional", este artículo explora las dimensiones reflexivas y emocionales del tema central del "trabajo contemporáneo", junto con los efectos sócio-psíquicos derivados de la participación en diversas herramientas y técnicas de intervención. Existen pocos artículos de investigación en la literatura (especialmente en Brasil) sobre este soporte metodológico de la Sociología Clínica y/o sus herramientas. La mayor parte del trabajo intelectual se centra en aspectos teóricos, metodológicos y de intervención, proveyendo poca atención a las perspectivas de los participantes. Las siguientes secciones presentarán diferentes aspectos de la participación en este GIR y sus herramientas de intervención. Además, analizaremos algunos de sus efectos, incluyendo las implicaciones de las autoras. Las experiencias relatadas en este artículo se dieron en un contexto grupal específico, con la aquiescencia de los participantes y la garantía de confidencialidad. Los datos utilizados en el artículo fueron anonimizados y utilizados con fines intelectuales y formativos, respetando los principios de escucha sensible, responsabilidad ética y no divulgación de información a terceros.

Palabras clave: Sociología clínica; Psicossociologia; Grupo de implicación e investigación; Análisis de implicación.

Introduction

The workplace has undergone profound transformations in recent decades, driven by globalization, technological progress, and productive restructurings. This reorganization of the world in the 1970s–80s (Nunes & Silva, 2018), marked by the Managerial Revolution, a term evoked by Gaulejac (2011), led to greater flexibility in labor relations, job precarization, and the intensification of productivity demands, responsible for new challenges for workers and organizations (Sennett, 2006; Antunes, 2018). In this scenario, collateral effects related to mental health, psychological

suffering, and identity and institutional conflicts emerged. The understanding of these effects depend on approaches that can integrate the subjective and social dimensions of work.

In this context, clinical sociology was developed and consolidated from the 1970s onwards, mainly in France, the United States of America, and Canada (Fritz, 1985). Influenced by Max Pagès' work with organizational groups, aiming to create a socio-therapy applied to organizations (Braz, 2021), clinical sociology acts in understanding the groups "as a transitional space between the psychic and the social" (Gaulejac, 2006, p. 216). Clinical sociology aims to integrate the psychological and social aspects, emphasizing their indivisibility (Bendassolli & Soboll, 2023). As Lagache (1949) says, it is "the study of the man in situation". Clinical sociology, beginning with the understanding that psychic processes by themselves are insufficient to comprehend the subject in situation, facilitates intervention with a complex clinical perspective. This approach encompasses the unspeakable, unspoken, and inherent contradictions, considering elements such as historicity, life narratives, emotions, and anxieties (Braz, 2021). By avoiding the individualization of problems, this methodology, of institutionalist origin, abdicates the expert position and rationalization and enables the collective production of analytical hypotheses (Braz, 2021).

This work examined a group-based experience, focusing on the authors' involvement and implication, a key aspect of the socio-clinical approach. Group situations that would uncover other members were not presented, to ensure a sensitive look at subjective and transference intersections, as well as a commitment to preserving the identity of other participants. The authors opted for a self-narrative and autoethnographic approach, adopting a participant-observer stance in the group meeting, in which lived narratives are a path to knowledge of the phenomena (Araújo, 2020).

The socio-clinical approach and the Group of Implication and Research

Given the transformations in the context of work precarization, socio-clinical considerations have gained relevance due to their comprehensive nature, offering a new perspective on organizations. The socio-clinical approach aims to address individual phenomena within an organization by listening to those facing conflict situations. This method investigates the intersections and reciprocal influences between the individual and the collective, as well as the psychological and social domains. It seeks to explore various phenomena of familial, social, and existential significance, in addition to examining the political, ideological, and managerial structures that influence our life stories (Gaulejac, 2012; Carreteiro et al., 2020; Braz, 2021).

Clinical sociology created research and intervention tools to provide spaces for listening and resonance, not found by individuals in their work environments (Gaulejac et al., 2020). Groups of Implication and Research (GIR) were developed by Vincent de Gaulejac, Michel Bonetti, and Jean Fraisse in the 1970s as research and intervention methods in the workplace (Braz & Hashimoto, 2020). They appear as an institutionalist source which aims to promote a group space that is not limited to the expression of individualities but rather allows the development of collective and social processes. Group operationalization facilitates the analysis of the irreducibility of psychic and social dynamics. This intersection is in which the transformative potential of the methodology is emphasized (Braz, 2021). Therefore, through its intervention tools and techniques, GIR allows for studying conflict situations and social suffering (Carreteiro, 2012) and has the dual objective of research and comprehension. The main purpose is to offer participants reflexive supports enabling them to understand their social trajectories and the connections with each history shared in the group (Gaulejac, 2016). The central hypothesis is that "personal history is produced by multiple factors including psychic, social, ideological, economic, and political, and that subjective construction depends on each subject's art of constantly building themselves from these different axes that intersect them" (Gaulejac, 2016, p. 299). Subjects can have a reflexive process to how to shift from being a product to becoming an actor in their own histories. With the theme work in contemporaneity, this group makes it possible to analyze the socio-family heritage that the subject receives from their ancestors, the ambiguous messages addressed to them, their contradictions. It highlights the forms of influence between the family sphere and the social trajectory (Carreteiro, 2002; Carreteiro et al., 2020). Among the possible methodological tools, we detail below the operative mode of some experienced by the authors: genealogical trees, social-professional timeline, and *organidrama* (Gaulejac, 2016; Braz, 2021).

Genealogical trees

The tool requires participants to reconstruct their family genealogy on a sheet, going back three or four generations, for subsequent group discussion. In this process, the participants can indicate:

[...] names of people, professions, cultural levels, moments and places of death and birth, as well as other particular traits, such as striking phrases, physical characteristics, personalities, qualities, and even eventual illnesses that were pertinent to their life stories (Braz, 2020, p. 191).

The represented and non-apparent elements (gaps) allow for advancing in the identification and thoughts on family structures and inheritances and in the understanding of the psychological dimension and the social interactions, particularly how the socio-historical context influences their decisions and values. These are at the core of family dynamics (Braz & Hashimoto, 2020).

Professional and social timeline

This representation consists of drawing a line on a sheet which the subject chronologically indicates the social-professional events that have crossed his/her history. The personal and family context influencing an individual's history is identified above the line, while significant historical events and social and political movements that may have impacted the subject's trajectory are highlighted below (Gaulejac, 2009). It is important to note that from the moment the instruction is given, there is no right or wrong. Each subject is invited to carry out the representation in the way s/he understood it (Braz, 2021). In the presentation of this tool, the analysis involves observing the crucial moments of the social inscription of the presenter's identity.

Organidrama or group sociodramatic technique

The intervention tool *organidrama* in small groups, situated between Moreno's psychodrama and Boal's forum theater (Braz, 2025), consists of creating a scene to represent concrete social situations (Castro, 2018). Developed by Gaulejac and other researchers in the 1980s and 1990s from interventions carried out in public and private companies in various sectors, it aims to point out the collective understanding of the origins of socio-organizational conflicts and dynamics of suffering perceived as recurrent, escaping individualizing thinking and highlighting the social phenomena involved (Braz & Hashimoto 2020). Its central hypothesis lies in understanding the existence of strong connections between the subjective register, that is, how phenomena are felt by subjects, and objective registers, such as organizational and structural logics that are at the origin of conflicts (Badache & Gaulejac, 2021). The *organidrama* is organized into three stages: preparation, when the group chooses a scene from the stories shared by each participant; the dramatization moment; and finally, the resurgences, a moment in which facilitation is extremely relevant (Braz & Hashimoto, 2020; Braz, 2025).

Since in the GIR each subject is encouraged to participate and sharpen their self-awareness and the group process, the interpretation of implications is an indispensable element. Implication cannot be conceived without sympathy and distance (Enriquez, 2001), a premise that seems to establish a balance between these two dimensions. Sympathy refers to the professional's genuine interest in the subject of their intervention. The professional is intrinsically linked to what they aim to comprehend and affected by the same issues influencing the participants in their interventions, while simultaneously confronting their own inquiries (Barus-Michel, 2004). Therefore, in this bond, the studied object cannot be considered totally external to the subject who observes it, who, in turn, does not emerge intact from this observation. It is in this self-reflection that a distance can be established, determining what belongs to one's own history and what belongs to the history of the other.

How to elaborate the state of being on a group-based experience

Before evaluating the effects produced as participants of a GIR, here is a brief description of the structure of the GIR that took place in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil, in 2024, in the context of a continuous training organized by the Network of Interventions: Individuals, Organizations and Society (Rede de Intervenções: Indivíduos, Organizações e Sociedade, in Portuguese), founded by socio-clinical psychologists and doctors Ana Massa and Jacyara Nasciutti. Following eight virtual meetings that allowed us to approach the socio-clinical theory, the GIR was a practical experience. It was offered outside

an institutional environment, entitled Life History and Social-professional Trajectory, composed of 12 voluntarily enrolled people from varied professional backgrounds and work institutions.

The activity was led by two facilitators with socio-clinical training, over three days. The group began with an introduction of each participant, with the establishment of the group contract, followed by a body warm-up exercise. The genealogical tree was the first tool proposed, in which each participant was asked to present information about three generations above their own, with the guidance to relate each family member to work. Author 2 was one of the participants who shared her results on the tools with the group.

- Author 1: in the elaboration stage, I noticed gaps in generational representation, a historical void especially in the generations before my maternal and paternal grandparents, which in a previous experience using the genealogical tree tool, in 2010/2011, had not caught my eye. My mother's recent passing somehow highlighted the need to preserve and rescue the history of previous generations, to understand who I am. The reflection of who I was now began already in this activity;
- Author 2: I realized I know very little about my father's family, especially from my grandmother's paternal part. I didn't know what to write about her. I initially chose the term *housewife* to describe her, but then I appropriated the expression *Madame*, used by another participant when presenting her genealogical tree. Although that name made more sense, it was difficult to accept due to my feminist stance. The use of the signifier *Madame* by another participant comforted me, supposing it designated a certain social status linked to the same era for women of a certain social class, in late 1960's Brazilian society. *Madame* is a French term that shows respect, it can be translated as *my lady*, hinting that she belonged to someone. In fact, calling her that already puts her real status more in perspective: belonging to someone. If, on the one hand, *Madame* gave my paternal grandmother a position in society, on the other hand, it popped up her lack of independence. I realize that what I know and what remains of my grandmother are the paintings she made, representing people and places important to her. It was her way to open to the world from her apartment, which she would rarely leave. I also noticed gaps in generational representation, a historical void especially in the generation before my paternal grandparents, my grandmother's parents. A thought arises about the invisibility of a large part of women of that era, who did not have an autonomous social position, with an identity linked to their spouses. On the other hand, I know many stories about my father's grandparents, as they founded a large company.

On the second day, the focus was on the professional and social timeline tool. The instruction was for participants to explore deeper into the labor dimensions of their lives. Author 1 shared the results of her representation within the group.

- Author 1: in this moment, I took a more active attitude in the group and jumped into presenting my timeline. It was not the first time I had presented it, and the re-reading exercise was influenced by the passage of time, the current GIR composition, and my personal and professional moment. But the fact I had recently lost my mother (a theme that affected all activities developed in the GIR) and had a daughter in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic made me revisit the issue of financial independence. It became clear how my professional choice to work in government was influenced both by my mother's speech of not depending on others' income and by my parents' and grandparents' involvement in politics. When presenting my trajectory, I found myself unfolding my experiences, not in the sense of a narrative of successive facts, a remembrance. The different approaches, the forgetfulness of the facts, and the highlighting of others differentiated my experience in the two GIRs I participated in, 10 years apart. This allowed me to think of this process as a reconstruction and a possibility to reposition myself and "reorganize the previous meanings of these same stories" (Gaulejac, 2012, p. 26). Additionally, in my first attendance in GIR, I presented my timeline in French, a language still in the learning phase at the time. At this participation, telling my history in Portuguese, my mother tongue, influenced the way I resaid it, allowing me to deal with elements with more freedom of interpretation;
- Author 2: unlike my colleague, I chose to listen more, understanding that in life I frequently throw myself into things and usually don't calculate the effects of my speech. In that group, I wanted to listen, adopting a posture like my new area of study: Psychology (my second graduation). I practiced sensitive listening and experimented making some hypotheses, seeking to understand the contradictions of certain situations, connecting them, when possible, to theory or events. I remember that another colleague presented its professional trajectory in over an hour. At first, I was attentive but after 30 minutes I felt a certain anger at having to wait for the end of the presentation. This time window of its narrative, the richness in details and perceptions, made me feel how quickly I wanted to tell aspects of my life, in order not to deal with them. My anger made me realize how I hid behind my objectivity, hiding both my sorrows and

achievements. There is a powerful work of self-deconstruction for a reconstruction based on what emerges in the group. And it continues in the resurgences after the end of the three days immersion.

The *organidrama*—the group psychodramatic technique—was the last activity of the group, filling almost the entire third day. The support triggered significant debate, especially after the subgroup's presentation on workplace gender violence.

During the resurgence part, aimed at exploring emotional connections and generating reflexive group thinking hypotheses, the spectator subgroup—which one author is a member—did not seem to accept the presented content. They thought the scenes staged implied the repetition of violence that was experienced. An introspective analysis was conducted on the necessity for society to consider its impact on the workforce. Several opinions seemed to echo in the room: How can patriarchal Brazilian society continue to reproduce this violence resulting from its slave-owning and colonialist History? Why are men in power capable of such cruelties towards women at work?

- Author 1: I judged the difficulty of taking a stand in those situations, to defend and thereby reduce the suffering of victims. Only after one of the participants demonstrated its perplexity, initially towards the method, could I feel overwhelmed by emotions. This feeling was certainly not individual. In one of the new configurations and re-staging, this sensation emerges. The difficulty is not just mine. Recognizing our ability to confront violent situations can also indicate a form of denial and protective shielding. We don't want to be the next victim. We don't want to be the next target, and this makes it difficult to report and collectively mobilize facing an institutional event of violence;
- Author 2: The chosen and represented scene was very close to the scene I presented in the small preparatory group for the *organidrama*. There was a feeling of being represented. What stands out was the contradiction between the violence of the scene and the excitement felt to stage the violence. The understanding I could reach is I wanted to be able to show how silenced I had been and to have my pain recognized. I had a double wound: social and narcissistic. At first, I realized what emerged in the group (especially among the spectators) was distress, almost a repulsion for the choice of the scene. I could understand how the mediation and the implication of the facilitators were crucial to providing the necessary borders. When I felt secure, I could feel how powerful it is to talk about discomforts. Being able to talk about what emerges produce effects. I was able, through these conversations, to shift from a victim and failure position to a place of power.

Here it is important to emphasize a methodological point. The facilitators care in framing situations is constant. They commit to a complex and sensitive listening, while paying attention to a multiplicity of group and subjective connections. Accordingly, a listening position from those who are social actors enables the appearance of implication movements, engaging subjects and moments of distancing and transference (Massa, 2025).

In previous intervention tools and techniques, there was a consistent emphasis on oral production using the proposed supports, exchange of impressions among participants, and highlighting the significance of group dynamics in encouraging engagement in presentations. The debates, tensions and reflexive practices carried out over the three days. The closing activity was based on an open conversation about each participant's involvement, recalling how they lived the tools, granting reflexive production and hypotheses (Carreteiro, 2002).

The generation of meaning between group-based experience and individual narrative

After this immersion narrative, it is possible to consider the effects produced on the authors, in their capacity as GIR participants. This seminar offers a space for generating meaning individually and collectively, enabling unique interpretations of participants' life stories, while acknowledging the influence of social factors. Thus, one can wonder what leads a person to participate in a three-day immersion. What motivates them? Based on the Freudian hypothesis, we are all heirs in our history, one can speculate the desire for the subject to understand its trajectory, beyond its birth. In a GIR, there is both a dimension of personal development and a formative mission. Therefore, this experience has a powerful position. It can produce, as subject and object of the intervention (Gaulejac, 2012), great effects of meaning generation and group exploration of institutional conflicts. So why not replicate the methodological possibilities offered by the intervention tools and techniques in other group contexts? The GIR is a privileged space to understand the influences across each person, using methodological and theoretical supports. There are many incidences such as social, historical, economic, family,

among others, and each subject will better understand its own life history by understanding the other's history, not the narrated rhetoric. It is a kind of movement of putting oneself in perspective for analysis. For which every group member (including facilitators) is a key piece. Thus, each subject's history will be woven from their personal history, in the encounter of that subject with the world, the others.

We can glimpse that autobiography is not just a simple narrative towards a story; it is a generation of meaning from beginning to end (Bouilloud, 2009). Sartre (2014) will advance the importance of understanding what the individual does with what was done to him/her because the given history is not an absolute truth. In the GIR, there is this care to articulate experience with what was lived. A back-and-forth between implication and distancing. Being attentive to transference movements, the circulation of words, and listening to others. Participation in a GIR may lead to encountering issues one might wish to remain silent about or is unaware of, but which eventually emerge. The analysis of their implication requires this double register (Nunes & Silva, 2018).

When looking at the genealogical tree or the timeline, for example, one can see more than a century of generated heritage. Current thinking on this topic highlights the depersonalization within contemporary work environments (Castro, 2012), in which individuals are regarded merely as company assets. This perspective reduces humans to agents serving production needs (Gaulejac, 2020).

In the group, there was a desire at some point to exercise what was learned (or apprehended), even knowing how much it would require in terms of prior studies, continuous training, time, and repetition. The simple will is multiplication. An ethical question then arises: who could benefit from participation in a GIR with the theme work in contemporaneity? Still with the thought of the future, we thought together: how to expand spaces of collective reflexivity within organizations, creating possibilities for generating meaning? Would the GIR mentioned above, offered outside the institution, be the path to follow? How do you invite workers to participate in these groups? A group-based experience appears as a group psychic tools capable of mediating these conversations, in which the group bond is very well defined and the issue of confidentiality is established from the beginning as an indispensable premise. As Enriquez (2009, p. 10) reminds us, "the individual is inseparable from the collective; the individual always refers to the universal." Thus, the GIR focused on the theme work in contemporaneity allows for readings or re-readings of one's involvement "believing in the possibility of new elaboration and the construction of other ways of being and living" (Souza & Carreteiro, 2016).

Conflicts of interest

Nothing to declare.

Authors' contributions

Conceptualization: Carreteiro, L. O. **Methodology:** Vinhas, V. Q. **Project administration:** Carreteiro, L. O. **Writing—Original Draft:** Carreteiro, L. O., & Vinhas, V. Q. **Writing—Review & Editing:** Carreteiro, L. O., & Vinhas, V. Q. **Final approval:** Carreteiro, L. O., & Vinhas, V. Q.

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