

Group Psychotherapy Literature: The Theme of Scapegoating

Zinner, J. (1989). The effects of parental self-esteem on adolescent individuation. In Foundations of Object Relations Family Therapy. Ed. J.S. Scharff. Jason Aronson.

For many individuals, interpersonal conflict is more tolerable than inner anxiety because the source of pain is externalised. This is the basis of scapegoating in which bad projections within group members are located within an individual who is then ostracised from the community.

Joseph H. Berke (1989). The Tyranny of Malice. Simon and Schuster.

Enviars use the psychological mechanism of projective identification to equate the scapegoat or trashcan; with its hated contents and to deny the original integrity and identity of the object.

Flapan, D. & Fenchel, G.H. (1987). The Developing Ego and the Emerging Self in Group Therapy. Jason Aronson.

They see scapegoating as a group resistance and a form of acting out. At times the therapist is guilty of promoting such behaviour towards a difficult patient.

The function of the scapegoat in the group is to channel and focus aggression. Some patients behave provocatively and frustrate attempts to

help them, but the therapist cannot condone scapegoating. The group therapist's intervention may well tip the balance towards that member being integrated into the group rather than being forced to leave the group.

Who has not hoped to outrage an enemy's dignity? Who has not been swept by the wish to hurt? And who has not thought that the impersonal world deserves no better than to be destroyed, by one fabulous sign of his displeasure? *J. Bronowski. The Face of Violence.*

Throughout history, it has been the inaction of those who could have acted; the indifference of those who should have known better; the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most; that has made it possible for evil to triumph. *Haile Selassie.*

It is man's own mind, not his enemy or foe, that lures him to evil ways. *Buddha.*

Anger and jealousy can no more bear to lose sight of their objects than love. *George Eliot. The Mill on the Floss.*

We have just enough religion to make us hate, but not enough to make us love one another. *Jonathan Swift.*

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied to a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. *Martin Luther King.*

1). Resistances evidence hidden transferences that must be explored. Helping patients to express feelings associated with the resistance provides the best avenue for resolution.

2). It is better if the group leader leaves the confrontation of such behaviours to the members of the group. But the group therapist has responsibility for deciding whether certain forms of behaviour should be tolerated because they also serve an adaptive function, or whether they need to be confronted because they may develop into a treatment-destructive resistance.

**Thompson, S. & Khan, J. (1988).
The Group Process and Family
Therapy. Pergamon.**

Scapegoating may not only secure continuance of the group, but also may secure an experience that is necessary for both scapegoat and persecutors, involving highlighting the basic conflicts of both parties. The two roles are complementary and each contains

its own opposite. Group and scapegoat have the opportunity of passing through a frightening experience and surviving it.

The leader must be able to maintain a difficult balance. One side of the balance is to allow sufficient stressful interaction to represent the inevitable conflictual situations that have to be experienced. The other side is to prevent the stress on any individual from extending to a breakdown that would damage victim and victimisers alike.

Digby Tantum. A Prophet in the Group.

The prophet in the group possesses the following attributes:

- 1). Disturbing outspokenness.
- 2). An authority that converts.
- 3). A conviction of the truth.

Thinking in terms of prophecy focuses on positive aspects of these patients and away from disease conceptualisations. In this paper the patient Helga makes statements that have impact because they cut across group defences. Is she a). Setting herself up as a scapegoat, a function of her masochism? b). Demonstrating her omnipotence? c). Expressing her aggression? d). Allying with therapeutic goals, perceiving the group defence, and being determined that the truth is spoken? Helga's statements are a revelation since they cut across group preoccupations. Their power comes from naming avoided and frightening areas.

A prophecy exercises a power over the imagination that may be self-fulfilling. In other words the prophecy exercises a power over meaning that infiltrates group and individual meaning-systems. Prophecy has a therapeutic potential since it questions assumptions, be they individual or group.

Prophets also challenge defences and are therefore likely to evoke the defence of being excluded from the group.

Is Helga a). Repeating the rejection she experienced at the hands of her father? b). Identifying with her father's stubborn independence? c). Reaction formation against the wish to be dependent? d). Projecting possessive and destructive feelings into others (projective identification/required relationship)?

Tantum focuses on the positive aspects of what might be considered to be disordered. He also feels that Helga was able to speak out because she was "without home". She was a stranger and her prophecies maintained her as an outsider. Management should be in terms of transforming these utterances into valued group comment and to enable group members to find immediate benefit from prophecies. The conductor needs to acknowledge the truth of these statements, rather than protecting the group against them.

Tantum takes the view that interpretations have many of the characteristics of prophecies (detached comments that speak about unspoken impulses and wishes, that create anxiety and challenge preconceptions. They are also about truth).

That man can destroy life is just as miraculous a feat as that he can create it, for life is the miracle, the inexplicable. In the act of destruction, man sets himself above life; he transcends himself as a creature. Thus, the ultimate choice for a man, inasmuch as he is driven to transcend himself, is to create or to destroy, to love or to hate. *Erich Fromm.*

Much less evil would be done on earth if evil could not be done in the name of good. *Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach, Aphorisms. 1880-1905. tr. David Scrase and Wolfgang Meider, 1994.*

The evil of our time is the loss of consciousness of evil. *Krishnamurti, in Stephanie Salter, "Evil's Shadow Falls across a Killer's Sanity Trial", San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle, 9th Feb 1992.*

Few men are sufficiently discerning to appreciate all the evil they do. *La Rochefoucauld, Maxims, 1665, tr. Leonard Tancock, 1959.*

The greatest evil is not done in those sordid dens of evil that Dickens loved to paint... but it is conceived and ordered (moved, seconded, carried and minuted) in clear, carpeted, warmed, well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voices. *C.S. Lewis, introduction to The Screwtape Letters, rev. ed., 1982(1942).*

Robert D. Boyd. (1991). Personal Transformations in Small Groups. Routledge.

In this book Boyd talks about the "symbolic influential member" and the various forms this member can take up in the group. A number of different forms of influential member have been identified: the charismatic individual, the central person, scapegoat, role specialist, etc.

The essential qualities of the focal person:

1). An individual member, through his behaviour in the group, may crystallise and constellate the latent, unarticulated emotional concerns of the social system. Scapegoating symbolises the social system's reaction to distress and an attempt to locate or identify the source of this distress. The perceived source of the distress is experienced as responsible for producing anxiety in the group or is viewed as abandoning, depressing, or potentially destroying the social system. The social system seeks to create a good group entity by excluding those elements that are perceived to be bad.

2). A critique of the status quo and movement towards a new awareness.

3). A voice for transformation of the social system. i.e. the hero, the prophet

It is important to recognise that all of the above roles may evoke scapegoating in groups.

Agazarian on Scapegoating

Agazarian identifies four group-level defences: denial, acting out, splitting, and scapegoating. Scapegoating involves choosing a target or container to carry unacceptable attributes. "Keeping unwanted feelings close at hand, the group may tacitly enlist, allow, or encourage a monopoliser to express its own obsessive concerns. Pushing unwanted feelings further away, the group may designate a victim who is then charged with being the group sacrifice, carrying in shame, demise, or extrusion the collective's underside, shadow qualities and awful, unassimilated or split-off parts. When a member is under group attack the therapist assumes a protective and sheltering function. He or she encourages the patients to see the problem as belonging to the group rather than to the person who is under pressure from the group"

K. Roy Mackenzie. (1990). Introduction to Time Limited Group Psychotherapy. American Psychiatric Press.

Mackenzie claims that scapegoating is the social role most in focus during the differentiation stage of any group. "The designation of a scapegoat demonstrates the projective mechanism at work in the social system. A group consensus forms that if a particular member were no longer in the group everyone else would get along satisfactorily. This allows the other group members to become unified and still deal with themes involving negative affect. This can be seen as a group mechanism for dealing with conflict. It represents an unstable compromise because the collaborating members are at the same time denying that other differences exist among them. If the chosen scapegoat leaves the process must be repeated in order to maintain the defensive position. Groups may go through several members in this way. A variant of this is for the group to agree on an external source of the problem.

The therapist must be ready to intervene if the scapegoating process becomes too active. There are several possible approaches:

- 1). Identify the source of conflict: often, the real target is the therapist who may have been giving mixed messages about the acceptability of leader challenges.
- 2). Support the scapegoat: this may enable others, who agree with some of the scapegoat's opinions, to join with him.
- 3). Halt the process.

Saul Scheidlinger. On Scapegoating in Group Psychotherapy.

There are two aspects:

- 1). The infliction of pain
- 2). A threat to group morale

Scheidlinger sees scapegoating as part of a magical belief that evil, guilt, and pain can be avoided by transfer onto animals, other people, and even inanimate objects. These carriers are then destroyed or exiled.

Allport sees scapegoating as displaced aggression. Adorno reveals that authoritarian, ethnocentric personalities are especially prone to prejudiced attitudes and scapegoating behaviour towards people who are different. Scheidlinger states that authoritarian leaders frequently use scapegoats to deflect hostility directed towards the father figure.

Lewin sees scapegoating as a means of achieving status and recognition where other channels of recognition are blocked. Kraupl-Taylor discuss the scapegoat in terms of the scapegoat being the carrier of the group's

unconscious envy and rage. Toker's view is that scapegoating in groups provides an arena into which aggression can be channelled and focused without presenting a threat to the individual or group. Foulkes and Anthony see scapegoating as a process in which angry feelings towards the group therapist are directed towards a group member. Whitaker and Lieberman say that scapegoating frequently occurs as a displacement of hostility onto the group member least likely to retaliate. The scapegoat is the recipient of unacceptable impulses that are projected onto him. Kellerman discusses how the innocent and scapegoater roles correspond to the passive and aggressive personality dispositional styles. The scapegoater is seen to be drawn to people who will absorb hostility.

Scheidlinger discusses the process of scapegoating: the scapegoat is likely to range from a wholly innocent person to a more or less willing recipient of emotions from the scapegoater. Scapegoaters are most often expressing the emotions of other group members rather than acting individually. Scapegoating is a group defensive act, dealing with unacceptable emotions - hostility, sexuality and guilt. The mechanism is displacement or projection, projective identification, with the aim of splitting.