GROUP OBJECT RELATIONS

Kernberg (1980) defined object relations theory as "A psychodynamic approach to internal inter-relationships".

This approach deals with the interactions between the <u>inner world</u> of the subjects (internalized relationships with others) and <u>actual inter-relationships</u>.

In mother-baby relationship, baby [Group] is the Subject and mother [Leader] is the Object. Group Leader is expected to perform the role of a good enough mother.

The Leader as a "Good object" must not enter into "roles" projected on him, is expected to contain them, elaborate them in within himself, and convey them to the group by reflection and interpretation.

Leader should enable all group "spoilages" emerge. He should not be overwhelmed nor blocked by them. He is expected to succeed responding to them not from his own inner world. He must try not to provide the group with immediate temporary needs, nevertheless, he is expected to transmit to the group the sensation he was aware of and he must acknowledge the group's needs. He needs to be present but not provide needs neither become a savior.

Elaboration –

is the group leader's main tool. It needs to be presented throughout the group process. Without elaboration group leader may respond in an unrestricted manner or respond from his own mechanism of defense.

Five Phases in Group Process

1. The Phobic Phase
2. The Paranoid Phase
3. The Schizoid Phase
4. The Manic Phase
5. The Depressive Phase

The Phobic Phase (Group Anxiety)

Relatively short interval.

Group setting is defined by group leader

High level of phobic anxiety with lack of proximity or distancing

Strong frozen emotional stress

Counter phobic elements such as verbal nonsense talking

Dependency vs. loneliness

Solutions:

a. Freeze = Be yet not-be

b. Contain phobia with leader's help and move into

The Paranoid Phase

Anxiety from Group or Leader as threatening objects
Fight- Flight
Members in group play the role of "a good child" – hiding competition, hostility and importunity (demanding)
Group creates Splits (which enables a shift to next stage: Schizoid phase)

Schizoid Phase

Central to Group Process and the longest one
Mechanism of defense: Split
Baby's split of the mother image("good-Bad") is causing a split in the baby's own personality!
Struggles of aggression and anger are mixed with deep needs for acceptance, support and warmth.
Always craving but stays hungry
Penedulum Phenomenon: approximation, emotional joining, closeness, indifference, non involvement, long silence periods, apathy, anxiety
Deal with Envy
Group is expected to give up on the ideal of a dividing world and accept life as a Good and Bad combination.

Manic Phase

Coping with inevitable pain, the group surrenders into the manic phase which blocks the group's process.

Manic Mechanisms: omnipotence (disdain against leader), Megalomania (group participant feels he is better than the group leader and beats him), Sadistic (sense of control over the object, humiliate and destruct the object).

(Bion: not nesesseraliy all group members – enough two)

Grandiose circles stuck the group

Insight – is the solution for this phase to advance towards the next phase.

The Depressive Phase

In the essence of this phase: the sorrow but acceptance that the notion of absolute "Goodness" in life is mixed with evil components. The objects is good-bad, therefore the subject (me) is good-bad.

First, object was "partial object" with a "good-bad breast" split, now object (the other) is integrated and contains both good and bad.

In the "depressive Phase" the group arrives to what Bion called: Work Group. Flight and denial are diminishing; leader is percepted as a human being. Group uses less "primitive defenses" and projections upon leader diminish. Less scapegoats.

Leader must display his resistance and durability.

Group accepts grief and remorse. Members display guilt feelings. Group can tolerate frustration. Regression to previous phases often occurs – it is the leader's role to help group move on to further developed phases.