'The Bad Enough Group Analyst': Authenticity and Emotional Responsiveness in Group Analysis'. A Response to Farhad Dalal's Foulkes Lecture

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Response

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'The Bad Enough Group Analyst': Authenticity and Emotional Responsiveness in Group Analysis'. A Response to Farhad Dalal's Foulkes Lecture

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The group can be a moral place only if it can contain moral challenges. For this, the group needs a sort of freedom to relate in which the group can move between poles of injury and regret, and between impassivity on the one hand and concern on the other. The emotional involvement of the all members with each other is a pre-condition for the ethical situation of the group. Emotional responsiveness entails authenticity. The authentic expression is spontaneous and unexpected (Nitsun, 1996). Sometimes it is impulsive, emotional, enacted and surprising. It can break through blockages of withholding. An authentic expression can be loving or hurtful. In group analytic psychotherapy, it is not only the excessive responsiveness of the therapist to the weakness and the suffering of the members which is the therapeutic factor. When each member is attuned to himself and to the other, the group fulfils its most important therapeutic quality. In this article I suggest that in order to develop these strengths the therapist must be able to be a 'bad enough' therapist with the group members.

It would be better to claim that therapist non-responsiveness is necessary for the formation of the group, as a body which gives meaning to each one of the participants. In a certain way it invites each of the members to be present and in another way it creates a situation in which the members are nearly forced to be present

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through the responsiveness of each of them in the lack of a satisfactory individual response of the conductor. I suggest that the analyst's authentic response corresponds with what Dr. Dalal calls 'emotional responsiveness'. This is in fact the 'bad enough participation' on the part of the analyst, which leads to a breakthrough in the therapy. The morality of the therapist is expressed in his willingness to move from the neutral analytic position and see himself as a reason for part of what is going on in the group.

Key words: ethics, morality, bad-enough, authenticity, emotional responsiveness

Introduction

The name of this article is taken from Eric Mendelson's article, *The Analyst's Bad-Enough Participation* (2002). Mendelson's article is written from a relational perspective and deals with the authenticity of the analyst and his professional, ethical position. In his article, he describes a psychoanalysis in which his patient expects him to read books that he, the patient, has written, and express his analyst's opinion. Mendelson agrees at first but soon finds himself bored and later also angry at himself and at the patient about his having had agreed to do so. Finally, when the patient asks him to read a third book that he has written, Mendelson, in an 'act of freedom' (Symington, 1983) says that he will buy the book himself when he chooses to do so, and read it when he has got time. He eventually does so and decides to express his true opinion. He tells the patient that he finds the book difficult to read and that the patient's overly focus on himself does not speak to him.

The patient then says 'My worst fears have been realized'(p. 331). Mendelson finds himself in the role of a harsh literary reviewer and feels guilty over what he fears as his expressed aggression. But, following this disharmonic moment in the session the patient chooses to cope with his analyst's unpleasant response by re-examining his writing. They both realize that this interaction has strengthened the patient's ability to experience, contain and elaborate moments of another person's painful disagreement. I suggest that the analyst's authentic response corresponds with what Dr. Dalal calls 'emotional responsiveness'. This is in fact the 'bad enough participation' on the part of the analyst, which leads to a breakthrough in the therapy.

It is my claim that the humanistic, ethical position in which we are interested does not just deal with responsiveness and authenticity but with the balance between benign narcissistic self-care (Krystal, 1988) on the one hand, and love of the object on the other. With a lack of self-care the therapist might deny his feelings and comply with the request of the patient in contrast to his heart's true feeling. Group members may comply as well with other member's expectations from them at the expense of expressing their needs in the group. Paradoxically the analyst may detract from both the patient and analyst's ability to realize their true 'responsiveness'.

Continuing along these lines, it is my intention to argue that the therapist's holding back his verbal response is not just due to the classic psychoanalytic approach stressing therapist impassivity. The refusal can be based on the belief in the authentic quality of the Buber's 'I–Thou' encounter. Attitude of love may be expressed in the group also by 'bad enough participation', which may include moments of conflict and hostility.

I will now return to group analysis. Recently I was invited to give supervision to a staff of group therapists in a large public clinic. The supervision included case presentations by the participants (one per meeting), followed by a 'group reverie' (Berman and Berger, 2007) and finally a summary discussion. I quickly realized that group therapy in that particular clinic was in a crisis. The therapy groups were small. Participation was dropping off. Some members were asking to go into individual treatment or meetings with the psychiatrist in order to increase or change their medication dosages. From the case presentations I understood that most of the therapists were actually doing individual therapy in the presence of the other group members and not really group analysis. Nonetheless the therapists were filled with empathy and concern for each group member. Indeed, group members had very difficult lives. They complained of anxiety, depression, helplessness and hopelessness. They came from poor working families and frequently were taking care of difficult children and life partners that were not functioning. The group therapists felt great sympathy and identification with members, something that created projective identification, which led the therapist themselves to sink into feelings of hopelessness and sadness. They expressed empathy with each member in his/her turn.

I remember one of the case presentations very well. The therapist presented a group in which one of the participants looked at the therapist with eyes filled with suffering, and waited while she tried to find

words. The therapist became aware that she was continuing eye contact with the patient for a long time during the meeting. We understood in supervision that she was afraid that if she looked away from the sad eyes of her patient, the latter might feel she was being abandoned by her therapist, leaving her all alone with her suffering. The therapist felt, every time she turned to another participant in the group, she was being cruel. She did her best to attend to every patient in the group but eventually each of them felt hungry and abandoned. As time went by fewer and fewer of the other group members turned towards the therapist. It was clear that they were feeling deficient and in the end would ask for individual therapy time.

One of the principles of the 'Copernicus Revolution' that Foulkes introduced to group analysis, as I see it, is that it is the group who is the patient and the therapist. The task of the group therapist is to help the group develop therapeutic qualities towards its members. These qualities can rest only upon the combined strengths of the group's members, forming the group as a whole's therapeutic ability.

I suggest that in order to develop these strengths the therapist must be able to be a 'bad enough' therapist with the group members. In group analysis, it is not only the excessive responsiveness of the therapist to the weakness and the suffering of the members which is the therapeutic factor. When each member is attuned to himself and to the other the group fulfils its most important therapeutic quality.

I suggest that in order to develop these strengths the therapist must be able to be a 'bad enough' therapist with the group members. Foulkes himself, by the way, (according to the testimonies of members of his mythological group shown in the movie produced by Luisa Brunory and Werner Knauss) never kept his eyes exclusively on one single member of the group alone. His eyes kept roving on the faces and behaviours of all the group members. It is clear to us that he tried to identify resonance in the group process by looking for the responses of the other members (Foulkes, 1975: 131). In Foulkesian group analysis, any member's expectation for individual therapy in the group is probably frustrated. I suggest that therapist's 'non-responsiveness' is not the same thing as the impassivity or neutrality of classical psychoanalysis. 'Non-responsiveness' does not contradict kindness and empathy as I will argue soon—it can contain empathic qualities as well.

It would be better to claim that therapist non-responsiveness is necessary for the formation of the group, as a body, which gives meaning to each one of the participants. In a certain way it invites

each of the members to be present and in another way it creates a situation in which the members are nearly forced to be present through the responsiveness of each of them in the lack of a satisfactory individual response of the conductor. Minimizing the centrality of the conductor in the group creates a need and challenges the members to be more involved. They respond to each other and in this way give meaning to themselves and to the others. We can acknowledge that from the point of view of the participant, the conductor is present through his bad enough participation.

Moreover, I see the emotional involvement of the all members with each other as a pre-condition for the ethical situation of the group. By being over-responsive, the conductor might be leaving the members dependent and passive. This situation might create impassivity in the participants, which eventually results in their position as by-standers for each other. In this way the group may distance itself from becoming a mutual space of ethical co-existence.

The Paradox of Authenticity

I will begin by quoting Farhad Dalal: 'Bion famously spoke of the difficulty of "thinking under fire", which I would reframe as responding with "authenticity under fire"'.

I suggest that authenticity does not obey the laws of love, guilt and reparation. It is what it is. The authentic expression is spontaneous and unexpected (Nitsun, 1996). Sometimes it is impulsive, emotional, enacted and surprising. It can break through blockages of withholding. It contains the quality of an 'act of freedom' (Symington, 1983). An authentic expression can be loving or hurtful. It can stem from a wide range of feelings and behaviour. The expression of authenticity is similar in my eyes to the experience of the 'True Self' as conceived by Winnicott (Winnicott, 1965). The individual feels that the self-state within him demands to be expressed. Many times this is the self-state that was rejected because of a history of compliance and placating (Bromberg, 1998). Each member's authentic expression may be experienced by other members as an empathic failure. Yet, I suggest that eventually empathy in the group is regained through a group process and becomes even more empathic than before.

In one of the group analytic groups that I lead, a very tense moment arose during a fight between two members. One of the female members spoke at length about being rejected by men since her divorce.

She attributed this to men's reluctance to be in touch with her teenage daughter. The group listened with patience for a long time. This was not the first time that this member told of her pain. The prior time she received empathetic reactions from participants and from me as a conductor, together with some expressions of frustration from some of the members that wanted to share their issues with the group too. The member had a tendency to get offended when someone would stop her. In this particular meeting, at one moment, one of the men lost his patience and in a burst of anger said, 'Because of behaviour like yours I divorced from my wife'.

I am not sure that I can communicate the intensity of anxiety that his outburst aroused in the group. It was as though a weak person was being attacked just at the moment she was expressing her pain. Group members were astonished by the crudeness of his expression. Silence followed and the member lowered her eyes and wept silently. The man looked furious but also hurt. Because of the pain of both of them, and the fact that they all knew each other for a long time, it was difficult to categorize the interaction between them into that of victim and perpetrator. The two members appeared authentic while at the height of their injury. As conductor I refrained from intervening immediately, even though I felt the intensity of their distress. The members looked at me. I think they perceived me involved and emotional, despite the fact that I did not react verbally at that moment.

Afterwards, the group discourse began. Someone touched her shoulder. 'You probably feel awful.' The participant wept silently and said, 'Leave me alone. I'll be okay'. A male member turned to the offending member and said, 'That was a little cruel, pal'.

At this stage I intervened. My remarks were directed to the whole group. I said, 'This might be a difficult and intense moment for everyone here'. I invited them to speak about what each was feeling. I refrained from categorizing the weeping member and the member who hurt her into victim and aggressor. Instead, I suggested that in such moments both the person who was hurt and the person who did the hurting might both be in distress, each for his own reason.

In reaction to what I said, another member spoke. He turned to the member who had been hurt and said, 'I am sorry you are crying but I must say that you get a lot of attention here. We listen to you a lot. I myself tried encouraging you in the last meeting. You did not even react to me. You rarely express gratitude, but always remember when you have been hurt. You ought to think about this because perhaps this is what happens to you with men'.

Another member turned to the member who had been hurt and said, 'With all your pain, I envy you that you can cry here. I don't ever dare cry here, and sometimes I don't feel anything. I stay at a distance'.

The member who had hurt the weeping woman only spoke at the end of the meeting. In the following meetings both appeared to grow closer, in mutual understanding and the ability of each to express concern to each other and towards the rest of the group members. However, in this meeting he did not apologize and did not take back anything he had said in the prior meeting. He said: 'All my life I have felt that I am not good enough for my wife. She would always walk around hurt and I am always guilty. That's how I felt with you, as though behind your hurt there was an accusation. Today I am rebelling. I'm fed up. I want mutuality'.

A member turned to me and said with anger and disappointment, 'You are not protecting us here. We are like children playing near the road and you don't say that there's a road here'. In response I turned to the group and said that maybe more of us felt the same as her in the group and would like to voice their experience.

It is clear to me that it is possible to interpret the event as an expression of transference between members (like the member who transferred his anger towards his wife to the member who was hurting) or as a transference towards me as a conductor (maybe as a father who does not give the group members enough protection, so that events like this one will never happen). Without overlooking the importance of the analytic interpretation, I see the transferential interpretation as not being enough under the circumstance. Such an understanding could be used as a defence mechanism of the conductor, as Dalal critically points out:

> And for this to be possible, it requires the therapist to come out of their analytic bunker to be responsive and be responded to. I think that it is the responsiveness of the therapist that brings alive the responsiveness of the patient and that this shift is in itself therapeutic. (2012: 421)

The event in the group was experienced by all of us as authentic and unique to that group at that point in time. It contained a quality of authenticity that demanded a personal reaction in the present.

Both the aggressive member and the member who was attacked by him appeared totally authentic in the group. The woman member (who had been attacked) looked beaten and rejected just at the

moment of her greatest vulnerability. It was as though 'her worst fears have been realized': her experience of rejection by men in her life was happening here and now. The attacking member looked as though he was rebelling against many years of accusations and compliance. In both instances it appeared that each of the participants were experiencing the significant events in his life and demonstrating them in group therapy.

The discourse in the group included subjects, which Dalal perceives as a part of the ethical component of group analysis. It is clear that there exist within the group aggressive potential that might erupt, and that one member might be hurt by another, the conductor included.

The discourse in the group also raised the question of the bystander, as the woman member related about herself or as another woman member attributed to me. The polarization between involvement and passivity is one of the themes that arose in the following meetings. The value of gratitude in contrast to a lack of gratitude interested the members. A lack of gratitude was experienced as hurtful and distancing. Gratitude was also discussed in the group as a positive value in human relations.

In the case I described the members were involved openly with my behaviour during the event. I chose to avoid turning personally to the member who complained that I did not protect her and other members in the group. (She could have experienced this as my 'bad enough participation'). Instead I encouraged them with my suggestion that there were other participants who felt like children playing next to a dangerous road and did not feel that I was protecting them. Indeed, there were two who joined her. With this, a clear preference developed in the group for a dynamic process in which important themes in the life of each member would be spontaneously and intensely re-enacted in the group.

The remorse that followed hurtfulness and the experience of guilt appeared in the room only gradually and over time. When the anger and anxiety diminished, there appeared expressions of concern (Winnicott, 1963). Processing the event, without denying its intensity, created in the group a renewed trust in me and in the strength of the participants. As a result of this, directness increased and from time to time authentic expressions appeared and tension went up. It seems to me that the participants felt that 'holding' in the group was maintained and the quality of treatment was raised even higher. This event was remembered for a long time as having special meaning.

Authentic, spontaneous expression of a group member can be a gesture of individuality. Smith and Berg (1988) present the conflict between attachment, individuality and belonging and alienation that he sees in each one of the group members. The relationship towards individualization in the group is ambivalent. Nitzun (1996) claims that in extreme cases there can be damage to the group, if there is not enough containment, and that individuality can become an element in the anti-group forces that may create fragmentation of the group. Hopper (2005) claims that a strong individual stand in the group may be an expression of aggregation that can arouse regressive defences of massification.

In contrast to seeing fragmentation as resulting from members' individualistic positions, I suggest that the conflict regarding the respective values of individualization and belonging is actually a necessary dialectic reflection of opposite poles. Each of us moves between individualization and belonging, and each position is necessary for physical and emotional existence.

An important aspect of the paradox in regard to authenticity is expressed in the fact that despite the unique, autonomous expression of a member, all the other members can identify with the movement between individualization and belonging in each one of them. This identification can actually strengthen belonging and the relevance of the group process to their needs. Spontaneous, authentic expression of each member, as shocking and frightening as it may be, can arouse this kind of identification and become a group theme.

Spontaneous, authentic expression of a group member offers the conductor the possibility of turning the group into an ethical experience as well. The lack of such expression makes the group more careful and distant and robs it of its moral value. The group can preserve the ethical element through its ability to contain authentic and individualistic expression of the member and preserve the continuity of relationships between the members over time.

Injury and Remorse

Dr. Dalal says: 'Remorse reveals the reality of the other as well as of the self as distinct beings' (2012: 414).

A member's authentic expression may be sometime aggressive towards other members and/or the entire group. Our attitude towards aggression in the group usually contains double meanings (Nitzun, 1996).

Foulkes believed that aggression in the group can be disruptive, anti-social and destructive. Although fragmentation in the group may come about as a result of aggression in the group (Nitzun, 1996: 177; Hooper, 2005), it is not necessarily always the case. Aggression can also have a positive value if the individual is an active participant in the group process and the group does not react with rejection, or worse, sanctions towards him/her. In such cases aggression is turned towards the neurotic defences of the other and ultimately also towards his own neurotic defences (Foulkes, 1946: 89). Gans (1989: 499–500) claims that aggression is what facilitates forgiveness, reparation and the deepening of bonds (cited in Nitzun, 1996: 175).

Back to the Conductor

The morality of the therapist is expressed in his willingness to move from the neutral analytic position and see himself as a reason for part of what is going on in the group. I do not see the work of the conductor as being educational. Moreover, it is not supposed to, in my opinion, bestow moral values to his group. It seems to me that the conductor should include in his work the 'bad enough participation', in which he purposely avoids quickly stepping in, stopping aggression and consoling and softening injuries. It is desirable that the conductor must see himself as involved in what is happening in the group, and to be prepared for participants to address his behaviour—what he does and what he avoids doing.

Bad enough participation by the conductor has two separate significances. First, that he/she prefers the group over the member/conductor dyad, and in this way shows a certain lack of compassion ('non-concern') towards each one of the participants. The conductor can forgive himself for empathic failures made in his attempt to preserve the entire group.

Secondly, he is able to acknowledge within himself the polarity between individuality and belonging. He senses himself the need to preserve his self-care functions (Krystal, 1988) and sometimes express his individuality in their presence. It is desirable that the conductor himself recognize the back and forth movement between the polarities of individualization and belonging. Hopefully he would know his/hers personal needs and authentic feelings. In this way he can identify with back and forth movement of each of the other participants, contain it and support it as much as is needed.

Bad enough participation by the conductor does not mean that the conductor deserts the group. In my eyes this kind of behaviour is a form of personal and professional presence, that enables movement between the poles, which I have described. In this way the moral challenge in the group, is not only discussed but also experienced in a personal way here and now.

I suggest that the conductor's attitude of love does not have to be always expressed by active verbal responsiveness, let alone individual verbal responsiveness. He may express it by empathic listening, by facilitating being addressed to, by being found.

Morality in the Group

> It is in this moment of finding and being found, that meaning comes alive. This is the same as saying that in that moment each finds their humanity recognized by the other and so come to know themselves as ethical beings. (Dalal, 2012: 421)

I agree with Dalal's idea regarding the ethical quality of group therapy. There is a possibility of ethical co-existence when people are together; and group analysis, indeed, can further this possibility.

The group can be a moral place only if it can contain moral challenges. In a group that contains only love, guilt and reparation, there is no moral challenge. Only in a reality in which there is hurtfulness can there be a real movement towards authentic remorse. Without injury, there is no meaning to regret, and there is not movement to transformation from a schizoid-paranoid position to love, guilt and reparation.

For that you need in the group a sort of freedom to relate in which the group can move between poles of injury and regret and between passivity on the one hand and concern on the other.

In regards to this I would like to once again relate to Foulkes' description of the group as a hall of mirrors (1964: 110). In the group, which enables a moral challenge each member can look at the one who is hurt by him and recognize his own part in causing it. The member's injury can also be a moral mirror. Looking into this mirror can be unpleasant and raise remorse and guilt, but it is a therapeutic tool of great importance.

If one takes 'seriously' Dalal's remarks (Dalal, 1988), a new meaning to group analysis can be arrived at. Without minimizing the

importance of group therapy with regards to the lives of each of the members, the whole group undergoes a transformation. The group becomes a place in which there is social therapy and not just group therapy. Each one of the members is liable to become, one way or another, an agent of such change, when he is equipped with a change in values that he underwent in the group. The ability to prefer looking in the mirror to a lack of reflection, and the solution to tense situations by expressing concern influences the whole group and not just the individual. This influence can be construed by us as a social influence stemming from group analysis. Perhaps in the chaotic world in which we live, this is just a drop in the ocean. Even so we can see in it a small contribution to the society in which we live.

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