

Special issue: *Group psychotherapy: between settled benchmarks and new horizons*

Introduction

It is well known that in past decades group psychotherapies encountered many difficulties of application and demonstration of its effectiveness and efficacy. This was mainly due to the complexity of the group therapies and the problems in measuring outcome and process of change (Kivlinghan, 2021). Despite the many obstacles and problems that group psychotherapies face conceptually and scientifically, they are now widely recognised as effective and efficient for treating patients with different diagnoses, in different contexts and based on different theoretical models (e.g., Barkowski *et al.*, 2020; Burlingame *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, across the years, group psychotherapy has extensively demonstrated that many issues related to the group dynamics and process have proved to be solid benchmarks for improving clinical practice (Rosendhal *et al.*, 2021). Nevertheless, more challenges are arising for group psychotherapy future, e.g. different groups of patients, diverse group settings, and innovative measures to analyse group processes and outcome. This Special Issue, entitled *Group psychotherapy: between settled benchmarks and new horizons*, was conceived both with the goal of providing a forum of discussion about concepts, models and methods that can be considered building blocks for research in group psychotherapy, and with the aim of presenting new perspectives and horizons that have been interestingly emerging in the last years.

The special issue comprises twelve contributions with different topics and objectives. Some of them discuss theoretical models which may allow to understand and analyse group dynamics and process of change. A wide number of contributions, instead, fall into a research section which concerns the efficacy of some group interventions, the specificities and challenges of particular model of group interventions, and the strengths and difficulties of the online group psychotherapy. Finally, a methodological paper focuses on a new process measure for the evaluation of group members change.

Despite the differences on topics, methods and models of group interventions, the papers of the special issue present some transversal aspects and dimensions. First, on a methodological level, some papers adopt qualitative methods based on the analysis of the transcripts of group sessions, focus groups or narrative materials in general. Such methods of analysis allow to capture the complexity of the group experience and to analyse the process of change of group members or the group as a whole. Other papers, instead, adopt experimental or quasi-experimental designs in order to verify the efficacy of some innovative or integrated models of group interventions which are increasingly developing even in the field of group psychotherapy.

The issue also transversally discusses some psychological constructs or specific group therapy settings that are at the centre of a lively debate. Just think of the increasingly evident influence of the concepts of attachment theory and mentalization to the group setting and the process, as well as the emerging attention to the online group therapy or to some transdiagnostic constructs. Others discuss the extent to which some change analysis methods originally developed in the field of individual psychotherapy can be transferred to research in group psychotherapies.

Specifically, the *theoretical* section opens with the paper by Mikail and colleagues, entitled *Group Dynamic-Relational Therapy for Perfectionism*. The paper discusses the application of group dynamic-relational therapy to the treatment of a transdiagnostic process, e.g., perfectionism, and it presents the phases of group development and some evidence of the efficacy and effectiveness of the model. The paper by Marmarosh and colleagues, entitled *Vital Signs in Group Psychotherapy: New Horizons in Positive Psychology*, discusses the relevance of vital signs (e.g., meaning, belonging, gratitude, hope, perspective taking, and attachment) in group psychotherapy and it proposes the integration of positive psychology into group treatment and research.

The *Research* section opens with two papers that both focus on the role of attachment patterns in group psychotherapy. Specifically, the paper by Maras and colleagues, entitled *Attachment Insecurity Predicts Outcomes in an ACT-CBT Group Therapy for Adults in a Physical Rehabilitation Centre*, discusses how attachment theory may explain individual differences in outcomes and help identify individuals at risk of poor health-related quality of life. The paper by Talia and colleagues, entitled *How do attachment patterns manifest in group psychotherapy? A qualitative investigation of in-session discourse*, presents a qualitative analysis of the sessions' transcripts to explore whether patients with differing attachment classifications (i.e. secure, dismissing, preoccupied, or disorganized) would communicate in group psychotherapy, both with the therapist and the group members.

Two papers adopt a qualitative perspective and focus on strengths and challenges of a specific model of group inter-

ventions, e.g., the Mentalization-based group therapy (MBT-G). Specifically, the paper by Morken and collaborators, *Experiences with antisocial personality disorder in group therapy, kindling pro-sociality and mentalizing*, explores the therapist experiences with patients suffering of an antisocial personality disorder. The paper by Pries and colleagues, entitled *More than one way home - Student raters' impressions of interventions and group processes in Mentalization Based Group Psychotherapy (MBT-G) and Psychodynamic Group Psychotherapy (PDGT)*, compares MBT-G and PDGT by considering the perspective of psychology students raters who analysed the sessions transcripts of both group interventions using tape recordings.

Two papers focus on the evaluation of effectiveness of specific group therapy models by using experimental and quasi-experimental conditions. Babei and collaborators, in the paper entitled *The effectiveness of short-term dynamic/interpersonal group therapy on perfectionism; assessment of anxiety, depression and interpersonal problems*, investigate the effectiveness of short-term dynamic/interpersonal group therapy on perfectionism and perfectionism-related distress such as anxiety, depression, and interpersonal problems. The paper by Koementas-de Vos and collaborators, entitled *The Feasibility of a Feedback Informed Group Treatment (FIGT) Tool for Patients with Anxiety or Depressive Disorders*, aims to explore the feasibility of the Feedback Informed Group Treatment tool for patients following interpersonal or cognitive behavioral group psychotherapy.

The research section also comprises a methodological paper on the adaptation to the group of a process measure initially developed to study change in individual therapy. Indeed, the paper by Esposito and collaborators, entitled *Tracking change in group interventions: a further adaptation of the Innovative Moments Coding System for Groups*, studies the reliability of the Innovative Moments Coding System for Group (the IMCS-G), a new method developed to analyze group members change during the therapeutic process.

Finally, three research papers focus on strengths and challenges of the online group psychotherapy. The paper by Margherita and collaborators, *'Isolated together': online group treatments during the COVID-19 pandemic. A systematic review*, presents the main findings on online group psychotherapy conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic with a focus on the therapeutic group factors, the effectiveness of some type of online group psychotherapies and the different settings and emerging dimensions.

The paper by Giordano and collaborators, entitled *The transition to online psychotherapy during the pandemic: a qualitative study on patients' perspectives*, investigates patients' perception about the transition to online psychotherapy by using the Consensual Qualitative Research method. Finally, the paper by Marogna and collaborators, entitled *The extended unconscious group field and metabolization of the pandemic experience: Dreaming together to keep cohesion alive*, analyses shared dreams related to the COVID-19 pandemic to study the evolution of group thinking and the utility of dreams to develop meanings that are useful to process the painful pandemic experience.

We would like to conclude this Editorial by thanking all the Authors and the Reviewers who contributed to this Special Issue which shows that research in the field of group psychotherapy research is making great advances in the development of valid and reliable methods for verifying effectiveness and of integrated models of interventions that allow to respond to the needs of different types of patients and settings, without however renouncing the complexity and richness of the group device. Nowadays, group therapy is clearly based on some milestones, but future directions seem to become more multiple and ever wider (Burlingame, 2022).

Guest Editors

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