

The Image of the Self in the Mirror of the Supervising Group¹

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This article refers to the 'Greek Model of Supervision', as practised at the Institute of Group Analysis (IGA) Athens and focuses on the relationship between a therapeutic group and its supervising group. This relationship includes the interaction between various persons and factors such as participating students, the presenter, the description of the therapeutic group being presented, the experienced observer and the mutual relationships of all. This network of interactions promotes the reflection of multiple mirror phenomena between the two groups and facilitates their exploration, understanding and studying as well as their developmental and therapeutic effect at many levels of inter-relations.

Key words: basic mirroring, supervision group, presenter, observer, Supervisor Protocol

Mirroring in group psychotherapy can be considered as the impact of information about the self that is derived through social interaction and relationship in the setting of an analytic group. The structure of the group is the mirror's setting, its boundaries of time and space in the mirror's frame (Pines, 1984).

S.H. Foulkes describes a set of very important therapeutic factors in an analytic group as 'mirror reactions' or 'mirror phenomena'.

The group situation has been likened to a hall of mirrors where an individual is confronted with various aspects of his social, psychological or body image. By a careful inner assessment of these aspects, he can achieve in time a personal image of himself not grossly out of keeping with the external and objective

evaluation. He can discover his real identity and link it up with past identities. (Foulkes and Anthony, 1984: 150)

In another place he says –

It is easier to see the other person's problems than one's own. Repression and the repressed, for instance, can be recognized when pointed out to others. This acts, however, at the same time as an analytic agent in one's own person. The discussion, interpretation or analysis of such material is therefore effective in a number of people at the same time, even if they merely listen to it. (Foulkes, 1948: 167)

Not only the patient who sees him/herself more and more in and through the group but also groups can mirror each other (Terlidou, 1989). This is a case of multiple mirror phenomena occurring between groups and namely between a therapeutic group and its supervising group.

There follows an example from a supervision group, and 'mirror phenomena' occurring in different levels, their analysis and interpretation, as well as their effects at many levels of inter-relations.

First of all it is necessary to underline and explain the group-analytic method of supervision, as practised at the IGA. Athens, a conception introduced by Ioannis K. Tsegos (Tsegos, 1984, 1986, 1995a, 1995b, 1995c, 2002; Tsegos et al., 2003; Papadakis 1989; Papadakis and Kouneli, 2003; Kakouri and Tsegos, 1993; Karayanni, 2004). This model has been used extensively for 24 years in supervising several kinds of groups – group-analytic, sociotherapeutic, psychodramatic, family and couples' groups, all within the context of the Open Psychotherapy Centre of Athens and the IGA (Athens).

The supervision of each therapeutic group takes place in a group setting. The supervision group consists of fellow students, supervisors and one experienced observer (a member of the training committee or a student from the previous year). The supervising group is co-ordinated by a student, namely the co-ordinator of the year. It should be stressed here that the function of the observer is that of a group member. Of course, he/she is more experienced, but is not there to co-ordinate the group.

The student presents his/her group on the blackboard, in front of the supervision group sitting in a semi-circle (stage 1 *Presentation*). In the second stage of the supervision, that is the *Analysis*, the group is expected to take an active part. After the end of the presentation the members of the group (including the observer), that is the

supervisors, report the *feelings* and the *fantasies* they had during or after the presentation – feelings and fantasies of any kind, concerning the presentation, the presenter or themselves, or the supervising group at the here-and-now. They also report what they regard as *main topics* of the therapeutic session. See Figure 1, Two Phases of Peer Supervision, (Tsegos, 1995a).

Each member of the group reads his/her report and the presenter writes all these on the blackboard. The final stage of the *Synthesis* of all this material is done with the participation of the whole group (including the observer). In this stage there may be some suggestions and propositions to the student about his/her interventions or interpretations, or about the group situation as a whole.

The whole procedure can be clarified further, as I.K. Tsegos points out, by examining the Supervision Protocol, which –

... not only makes the role of the conductor – who is a student – easier, but structures the whole process itself. The version currently in use serves as a rule of thumb even to very inexperienced students, enabling them to participate in the supervisory procedure right from the beginning actively and effectively. The various parts of the Supervision Protocol also provide important information for dynamic (structural) and practical as well as research purposes. (Tsegos, 1995a: Chapter II, page 125)

See Figure 2, Supervision Protocol: (Tsegos, 1995a).

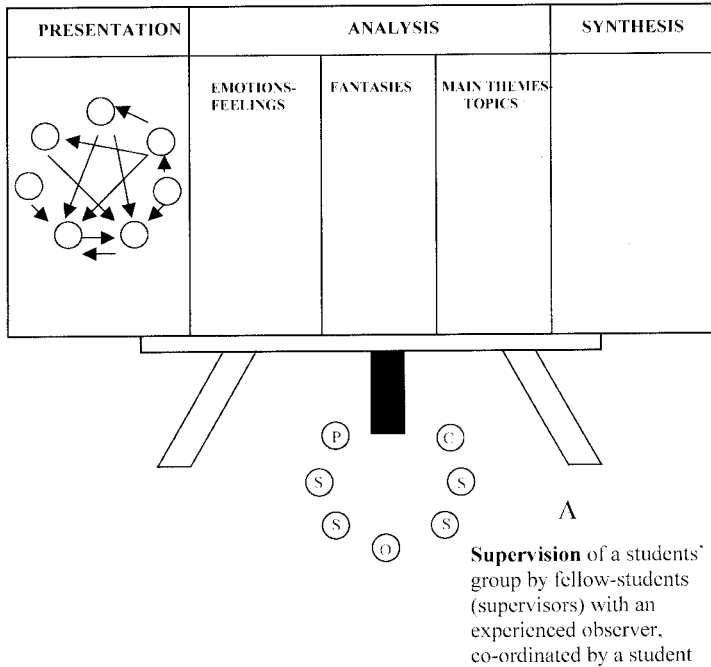
We suggest that there are times when the supervising group gives evidence that it is blocked, or that it is not productive, or generally that is something going on with the material that the supervision group offered during the Analysis stage. In the case we have a group phenomenon that has occurred as a repercussion of mirroring or resonance phenomena coming from the presented group, or indeed, because something is going on in the supervision group. It is of course up to the skill of the group to diagnose such a case and intervene accordingly (Tsegos, 1984, 1986, 1995a, 2002; Tsegos et al., 2003). In this case the students (members of the supervision group) reform in a circle and face the situation as an affair of the present group.

Clinical Example

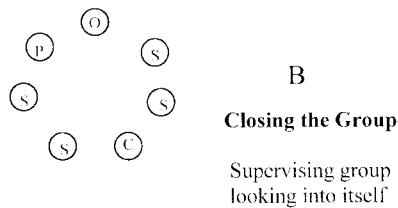
The supervision group referred to had a new composition. The observer and the presenter were participating for the first time. The other three were old members of the group.

FIGURE 1
Two Phases of Peer Supervision

a) *The supervisory process*



C= Conductor (student)
S= Supervisors (students)
O= Observer (trainer)
P= Presenter



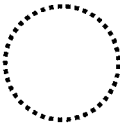
The therapeutic group was also a new one (6th session). The presenter had the feeling the presentation was important: it was his first presentation in supervision of that group in which he was the conductor (therapist).

Next will be described some of the events and main topics of the *therapeutic session*. In the beginning the group members talked about a new member due to arrive in the following session, and some of the members said that they missed

FIGURE 2
The Supervision Protocol

SUPERVISION PROTOCOL

1. Supervisory session of the ... year students of the Training ☐ -
Intertraining Supervision ☐
2. Present members of the supervisory group (no): 3. Absents (names) :
4. Name (supervisor student or trainer) :

P R E S E N T A T I O N	Supervisory Activity 5. Type of Therapeutic Activity Group-analytic group <input type="checkbox"/> Experiential group <input type="checkbox"/> Sociotherapeutic group <input type="checkbox"/> Psychodrama group <input type="checkbox"/> Oneirodrama group <input type="checkbox"/> Dyadic meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Family-Couple therapy <input type="checkbox"/> Psychological Assessment <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Therapist (Presenter): Cotherapist (Presenter): 7. Date of Session: 8. Location: 9. Time: 10. Frequency: 11. Absences:	 12.	Supervisory Group 13. Conductor (student): 14. Observer (trainer): 15. Location : 16. Date: 17. Time:
			18. Additional Information:
	19. EMOTIONS-FEELINGS	20. FANTASIES	21. THEMES-TOPICS
A N A L Y S I S			
S Y N T H E S I S	22. Comments and Conclusions: 23. Was there any need to 'close the circle'? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> 24. Who intervened ? Conductor <input type="checkbox"/> Observer <input type="checkbox"/> Supervisor-students <input type="checkbox"/>		

the group during the week. One member was 45 minutes late, she came in very angry because of her delay and this caused an explosion of anger in the group. Another member reported a dream he had the previous night: he had seen himself in a huge, dark room, he was down on the floor between old furniture and could not move or stand up. The conductor was there in the middle of the room talking with a friend of the said member without paying attention to him, a fact which bothered the member a lot. The discussion about the new member

who was due to arrive in the following session triggered a fantasy about a shipwrecked man to be rescued by the group and a referral to the movie 'The Schizophrenic Killer With The Saw'.

After the presentation, the dominant *feelings* reported by the members of the supervision group were anxiety, anger, tension, insecurity, abandonment. The *fantasies* had similar content: a bus full of people was starting to move, the door was still open and one man was hanging from the open door.

The presenter started to feel very tense during the stage of the *Synthesis*, that is the discussion about the therapeutic group. He was very anxious and feeling angry. The supervisors (fellow students) asked the presenter about his relationship with his cotherapist and they expressed very aggressive feelings towards the cotherapist. They also suggested that the presenter should do something about the said relationship. The presenter's reaction to this suggestion was very intense. He talked about his own feelings during the presentation and about the things that bothered him (delays, etc.). The tension between the supervision group and the presenter was very strong and the observer proposed to stop the supervision and investigate what was happening between the presenter and his cotherapist. They reformed in a group setting and started exploring what was happening among them.

Some minutes later it became clear that the supervision group had a very strong reaction because of the 'invasion' of the two new members – the observer and the presenter. All this emotional material was being reflected on the therapeutic group via the presentation on the blackboard. The manifest content of the supervision (on the blackboard) 'mirrored' the latent content, that is the dynamics of the supervision group.

According to the concept of mirroring, the supervision group recognized the problems and the tension which dominated in the therapeutic group because all that material was a reflection of its own dynamics which were hidden until then. We considered the aggression of the supervision group towards the presenter's cotherapist, who was not participating in it but would introduce a new member to the therapeutic group, to be very characteristic.

Here is another mirroring: the aggressive feelings of the supervision group towards observer and presenter were directed towards the presenter's absent cotherapist.

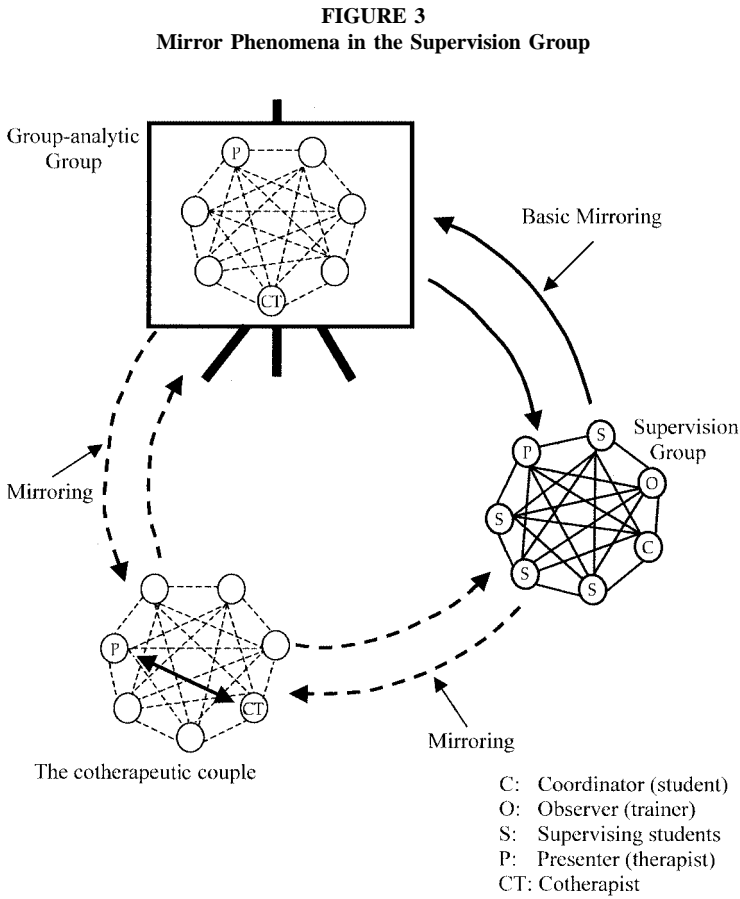
After this 'basic mirroring' another reflection was revealed between the cotherapeutic relationship and the therapeutic group: the day before supervision day, the presenter had a meeting with the new member, who was due to the therapeutic group in the following session, and with the cotherapist (he was his patient). The cotherapist forgot the meeting altogether and there was a strong argument about this. Here is another 'mirroring' between the cotherapeutic relationship and the therapeutic group. The quarrel

with cotherapist reflected (mirrored) the analogous feelings in the therapeutic group.

Consequently there exists –

- 1) the ‘basic mirroring’ between the supervision group and the therapeutic group.
- 2) The ‘mirroring’ between the cotherapeutic relationship and the therapeutic group.

See Figure 3, Mirror Phenomena in the Supervision Group. (Kouneli, 1987).



Concluding Remarks

Next will be considered some effects of the resolution and analysis of the 'basic mirroring' in the supervision group in respect to 1) the therapeutic group, 2) the supervision group and 3) the cotherapeutic relationship.

1) The therapeutic group:

After the analysis of the mirroring process in the supervision group, it became more easily understood what would be happening in the therapeutic group during the next session. Through the image of himself in the mirror of the supervision group, the presenter could both recognize and understand the very intense feelings which were expressed in a most dramatic way with fears, anger and insecurity as well as unusual physical symptoms. The therapeutic group was then able to relate those feelings to the arrival of the new member, to the expansion of the group and to the personal unconscious fears and anxieties. The members also expressed similar feelings about the forthcoming Christmas holidays which were to be the first holidays for that group. We believe that deep exploration was very important especially due to the young age of the group. And indeed, after that, the group had no difficulty in accepting the new member as part of it, and the new member could also feel part of the group and trust the group in a short period of time. The group as a whole made a very important step towards integration and maturity.

2) The supervision group:

The presenter's relationship to the supervision group as well that of the observer's were strengthened and both were fully accepted as members of the group. In the following supervising sessions the group was very productive with a great deal of important benefit for our group work. The reflection of the supervising group situation through the mirror of the therapeutic group helped all the members (supervising students) to recognize and accept their antagonistic feelings towards each other, and the supervision group proceeded to a more mature and productive way of working.

3) In the cotherapeutic relationship:

In the inter-personal level, the presenter's relationship with his cotherapist balanced out to a more horizontal level. Through the mirroring of himself in the supervision group, the therapist gained a

very deep insight: as therapist of the group, he was reacting to the new member's introduction, a patient of his cotherapist, and to the change of their relationship which was to become more horizontal (equal). He could also recognize the cotherapist's difficulty in separating from his patient and trusting him to the group, a fact which would involve the strengthening of his image, his role and his greater investment in the group.

To summarize, at the IGA (Athens) we believe that the occurrence of the basic mirroring and especially its analysis and interpretation in the supervision group was the repercussion of many other reflections on different levels of inter relations. This multiple mirroring was a phenomenon exploratory, negotiable and dialogical (Pines, 1998) between two groups (the supervision group and the therapeutic group) sharing the same psychological space – the matrix of the supervision session comprising the interaction of different persons and factors, such as fellow students, the presenting student, the account of the presented group session, the experienced senior colleague and the interrelations in this network (Tsepos, 1995a).

We can assume that the group-analytic method of supervision promotes and facilitates similar phenomena and more especially, that it is the group-analytic culture which steadily promotes reflection and understanding of unconscious processes which otherwise would not have been easily recognized and resolved. In addition, the preoccupation of the supervision group with its own dynamics offers students the opportunity to attain true knowledge, that is awareness, of the group phenomena and the way in which these relate to the therapy session. Therefore, this awareness can lay the groundwork for the deeper emotional response of the trainees towards the group as a whole, thus helping to enhance their therapeutic skills and personal differentiation (Skandaliari, 2000). It is also particularly useful in cotherapy, where it can reveal the dynamics of the partnership and prevent future problems (Kouneli et al. 1992, 2002a, 2002b). Its use of a structured and detailed written account of the session enables it to be used for research purposes and especially for studying group phenomena, such as mirroring, resonance, etc.

Note

- 1 Paper based on a presentation at the 7th European Symposium in Group Analysis held on September 1–6, 1987, Oxford, England

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