

## Group therapy for pathological love Grupo terapêutico para amor patológico

Dear Editor,

Pathological love (PL) is a repetitive behavior of uncontrolled excessive care for the romantic partner in a loving relationship, renouncing activities and interests once valued.<sup>1</sup>

Lee uncovered six love styles (Eros, Ludus, Storge, Pragma, Mania, Agape).<sup>2</sup> In this model, the Mania love style corresponds to PL, which is experienced as an obsessive emotion that dominates the individual, who feels forced to continually attract the partner's attention.

We selected through media advertisement 8 individuals that felt that their way of loving made them suffer. The intervention proposed was based on psychodramatic analysis. Psychodrama group therapy is an effective approach for the enhancement of interpersonal relationships by promoting psychological insight, helping self-esteem improvement, and consequently, contributing to the development of healthier relationships.<sup>3</sup> Intervention comprised 18 consecutive weekly sessions summarized on Table 1.

Mean age of the participants was 41.5 years (SD = 9.75), the majority were women, currently divorced or single. Psychiatry comorbidity was assessed by the Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview (MINI)<sup>4</sup> and major depression was the most frequent diagnosis (n = 5).

Participants answered a 6-point Likert-type analogue scale assessing dependency on the relationship that motivated treatment-seeking (higher scores meaning a healthier relationship). Scoring on this Love Health Scale (LHS), varying from 0 to 100, is initially defined by the patient who shares with the group her/his reasons for such self-score. Then, a final score is defined through interactions and suggestions by other group members, having the therapists as the impartial facilitators of the scoring process. The Love Attitudes Scale (LAS)<sup>5</sup> provides scores on each type of love previously described on Lee's work. The lowest of all six scores is

Table 1 – Sessions and objectives of the Group Program for Pathological Love

Sessions	Objectives
1	Orientation and therapeutic contract
2	Evaluating PL's intensity, assessed by LHS
3	Relieving anxiety, fear and sadness
4	Choosing goals
5	Recognizing oneself through "role play"
6	Reducing illusions, knowing the real partner
7	Identifying and relieving negative feelings concerning the partner and oneself
8	Detecting and working the symbiotic bond
9	Checking the psychological function delegated to the partner
10	Identifying and working emotional emptiness
11	Getting in touch with the family of origin relationship model
12	Understanding the background and meaning of the emotional emptiness and taking responsibility
13	Identifying and relieving negative feelings concerning parents and oneself
14	Identifying and working the inner conflict (healthy vs. pathological)
15	Identifying and working the inner conflict projected at the partner
16 and 17	Debriefing
18	Reevaluating PL's intensity, preparing for discharge and further referral if necessary

the person's predominant love style. The LHS and the LAS were both administered at baseline and at last session of the program.

Pre-treatment scores on the LHS varied from 0 to 60 (Mean = 18.1, SE = 7.8) and post-treatment scores from 60 to 90 (Mean = 72.5, SE = 4.5), a significant difference at ANOVA for repeated measures ( $F_{(1,7)} = 65.5, p < 0.001$ ). Regarding the LAS, at the beginning of treatment seven patients had Mania as their predominant love style. At treatment end only three kept Mania as their main love style, a difference that approached significance at Fisher's test ( $p = 0.09$ ).

Since it is a case series, the small sample size and lack of control precludes generalization. Nonetheless, it is the first communication on a structured therapeutic approach to PL. These preliminary findings suggest that psychodramatic analysis is a promising approach to PL.

### Disclosures

Writing group member	Employment	Research grant <sup>1</sup>	Other research grant or medical continuous education <sup>2</sup>	Speakear's honoraria	Ownership interest	Consultant/ Advisory board	Other <sup>3</sup>
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\* Modest

\*\* Significant

\*\*\* Significant. Amounts given to the author's institution or to a colleague for research in which the author has participation, not directly to the author.

Note: AMITI = Ambulatório Integrado dos Transtornos do Impulso; USP = Universidade de São Paulo; ANJOTI = Associação Nacional do Jogo Patológico e Outros Transtornos do Impulso; CAPES = Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior; FAPESP = Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo.

For more information, see Instructions for authors.

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